THE MUNSEY MAGAZINE

ALL FICTION COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE

NOVEMBER

P S

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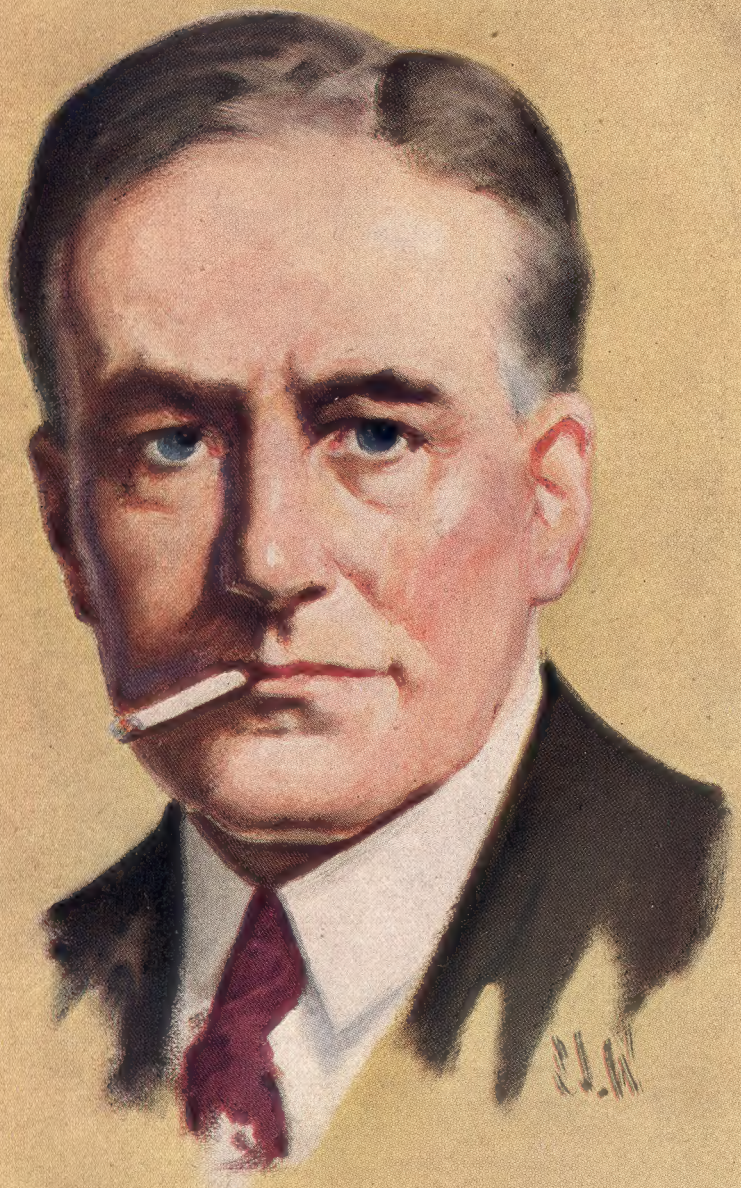

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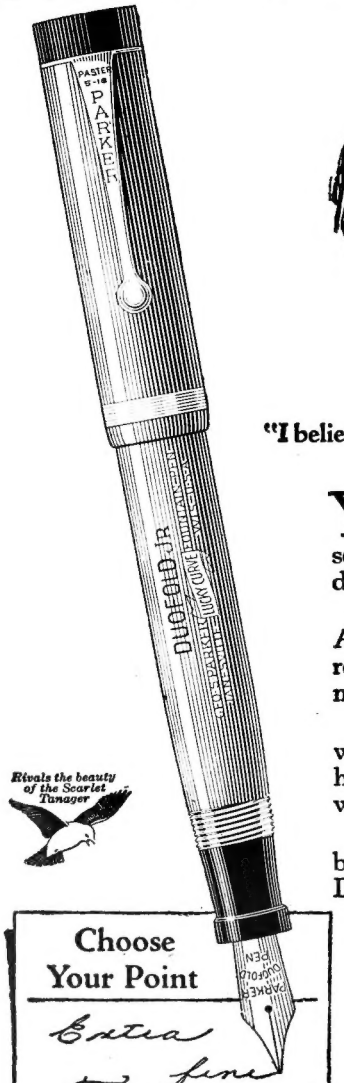

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MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE

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THE DECEMBER MUNSEY (on sale Friday, November 20) will contain a complete short novel by Theodore Goodridge Roberts, "The Loup Garou," an absorbing story of life in the Canadian woods, and a clever novelette by Walter A. Sinclair, a romance of business in the West, with the title "Be Yourself!"

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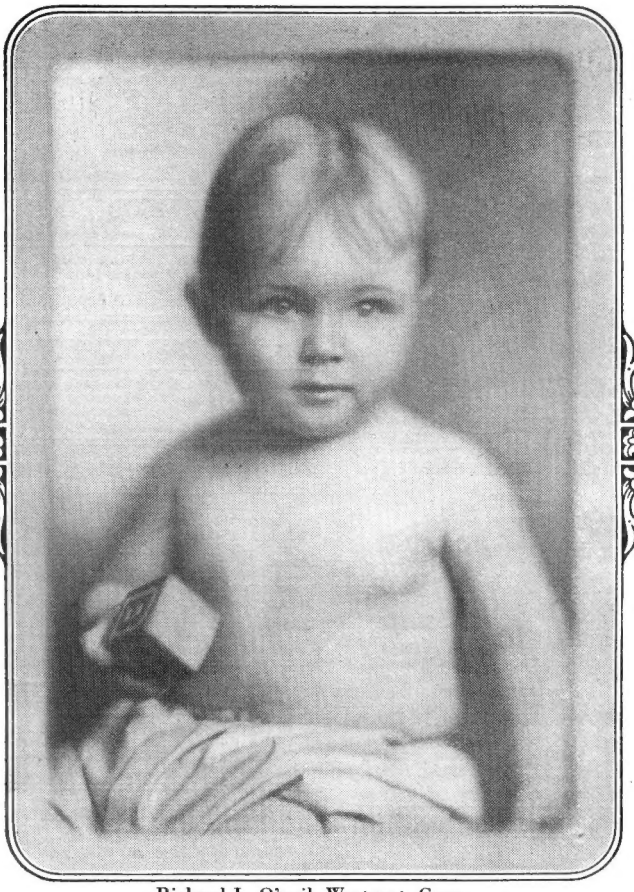

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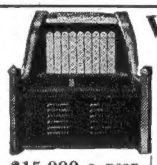

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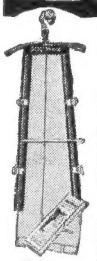

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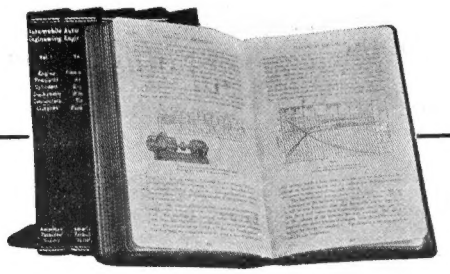

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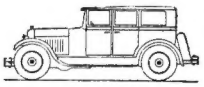

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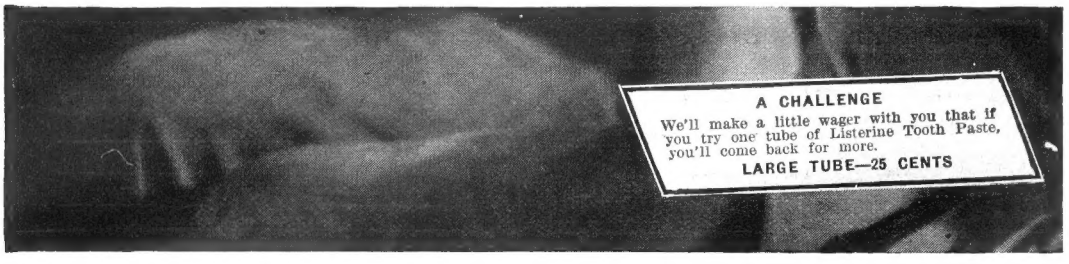
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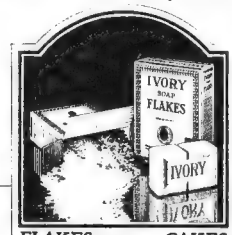

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MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE

NOVEMBER, 1925

Vol. LXXXVI NUMBER 2

His Dead Life

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE — THE STRANGE STORY OF JOHN DEAN, OF LEESVILLE, AND PHILIP BRENT, OF DETROIT, WHO WERE ONE AND THE SAME MAN AND ALSO TWO DIFFERENT MEN

By Louis Lacy Stevenson

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SAND LAKE was a water-filled chasm, its depth more than two hundred feet. It was fed largely by springs, and its waters, even in midsummer, were almost ice-cold. It lay in such a position that a slight puff of wind caused it to break white. Accidents were not uncommon, and Sand Lake never gave up its dead.

At the head of the lake was Leesville, named for Sherman Lee, who, after General George Washington no longer needed his services, laid out the town and built the mill. When Leesville was a prosperous settlement of several hundred people, he sent for his old comrades in arms, Enos Dean and Hezekiah Moore, who were not doing so well in New York; and from the day of their arrival, Leesville always had a Dr. Moore and a Lawyer Dean. In time, as Sherman Lee died childless, the Moores and the Deans became the first families.

A century and a half after its founding, Leesville—complacent, placid, governed largely by tradition, and with the life of almost every one of its ten thousand inhabitants known to the other nine thousand, nine hundred and ninety-nine—believed that eventually John Dean and Grace Moore would be married. They had grown up together, had graduated from the Leesville High School on the same June night, and would have attended the same universities; but family tradition sent them to different colleges, though their diplomas bore identical dates.

Immediately after his graduation, John

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Dean reopened the law office that had been closed because of the death of his father the year before. As Grace Moore's brother had already begun the practice of medicine, tradition was satisfied, for Leesville had its Dr. Moore and its Lawyer Dean.

No great necessity existed, however, for John Dean to apply himself strictly to his profession. An orphan, his mother's death having preceded that of his father by several years, his inheritance, though it did not make him wealthy even according to Leesville's standards, was ample for his needs. He spent much of his time in playing golf, in sailing his fleet canoe, the Redwing, over the treacherous waters of the lake, the danger adding zest to the sport, and in fostering and attending with Grace Moore the numerous social affairs of the Leesville Country Club, located about halfway down the lake.

John Dean's devotion to sport, though it interfered with his practice, was held by Leesville to be another reason why the union between the two oldest families was all the more desirable; for Grace Moore, too, loved the outdoors. She swam, golfed, and motored. Her hand on the wheel was just as steady when the speedometer registered seventy as when loafing along at thirty; and though Dean was held to be the best sailor on the lake, she could get almost as much out of the Redwing as he.

Similarity in tastes did not extend to physical characteristics. Grace Moore was not tall, though her erect carriage made her seem above medium height. Her eyes, over which dark brows arched, and her hair were so deep a brown that they were frequently mistaken for black. Her face was rounded, with vivid coloring, the few freckles on her small nose adding piquancy to her beauty.

John Dean's height was about six feet. His frame was rather loosely knit, his hair light, and his eyes blue. His nose, while not exactly long enough to detract from his appearance, was nevertheless a noticeable feature. It was a "Dean nose"—a distinguishing attribute of the men from whom he descended.

The contrast was more than physical. Grace Moore was quick-moving and quick-speaking; John Dean spoke with a drawl, and his movements, while by no means sluggish, were deliberate in comparison with hers. She gave the impression of a yeasty composition unsatisfied save by action, yet with great reserve force. The impression he gave was one of indifference almost approaching laziness.

Leesville, seeing them always together, waited with patience for the announcement that it felt certain would be made. This patient wait endured until William Traverse had been a resident of the town for three years. Then Leesville, its complacency, placidity, and conservatism upset, speculated whether John Dean or William Traverse would accompany Grace Moore to the altar of St. John's Episcopal Church.

If such a contingency had been suggested when Traverse first arrived, Leesville would have questioned the sanity of the person who advanced it. Traverse came unannounced, rented a small office well down Main Street—where the stores were shabbiest and the sidewalk displays largest—and hung out a modest sign that designated him as a lawyer.

Quite soon thereafter, Leesville learned that one of Traverse's most cherished possessions was a card that showed him to be a member in good standing of the Bricklayers' Union. He volunteered the information that he had paid his way through law school by laying bricks. He was a stocky, muscular man, whose gray eyes had a keen look, while his hair was an undeniable red.

For the first six months Leesville quietly but effectively ignored the newcomer. At the end of that period, not a client having crossed his threshold, he disappeared, and Leesville thought that he had given up the fight, having found the odds too heavy. Within a few weeks, however, he came back, with fresh calluses on his hands, but with money enough to pay some minor bills that he had incurred, and to resume his wait.

Then Shadrach Billow, the town ne'er-do-well, was arrested, for perhaps the dozenth time, on a charge of petit larceny. Instead of following his usual custom of pleading guilty, Shad stood trial, with William Traverse as his counsel. He was defended so cleverly that for the first time he escaped thirty days of hard labor—a matter of some concern to the street commissioner, who had been counting on Shad's services, he being an experienced man.

That case was the turning point. Clients began to seek out Traverse, some because Dean had refused to handle their cases, and others since, when not in court,

Traverse could always be found in his office. In less than a year after the Billow trial, he had moved his office three blocks nearer to Dean's and had bought a small parcel of real estate.

The success of Traverse annoyed Dean not at all. Magnanimous by nature, he admired the other man's sturdy independence and tenacity, which, without family or other aid, had in a measure overcome the conservatism of a tradition-governed town. The newcomer's accomplishment mattered little to Dean, as the clients of his father continued to come to him, to trust him in important matters, and to leave their securities in his care.

He never encountered Traverse socially, his contacts being only those of the courtroom. Indeed, so far as Leesville society was concerned, William Traverse did not exist; he had not been born in the town, and his hands were still rough. Nevertheless, two years and six months after he had come to Leesville—he then owned the building in which his office was located, and Nellie Deering, daughter of an old family to whom fortune had not been kindly, was his stenographer—William Traverse was a caller at the Moore home. While this did not seem to impress John Dean, it caused Leesville to gossip not a little.

Dr. Moore was responsible for the social recognition of Traverse. Being unmarried, the doctor lived with his mother and sister, and, as the head of the house, invited to it whomsoever he chose. In a way that practicing physicians have, he had learned that Traverse and he were fellow members of an honor fraternity — something which Traverse, so far as was known, had never mentioned in Leesville; and that membership removed all existing barriers.

That Grace Moore should be interested in Traverse did not astonish John Dean in the slightest. Traverse was the type of man she admired, the type into which she had endeavored, subtly at times and openly at others, to transform John. Indeed, he fully intended to be a man of that type when he settled down to the serious business of life—which would be, of course, when he was Grace Moore's husband. In her eyes he detected, when she was urging him, something resembling fire, which moved him strangely, but not sufficiently to induce him to make the change.

But it never entered Dean's head that Grace Moore's interest in this former bricklayer would reach a point where Leesville would regard him as a serious rival of John Dean—not that he was stupid, but because he was so sure that when he was ready, Grace would share his home with him. True, he had never asked her to be his wife. He merely assumed, as did Leesville, that they were engaged.

When he encountered Traverse more and more frequently in the Moores' living room, and discovered that the other man was sharing Grace's time with him, he did not take a serious view of the situation—not even to the extent of being annoyed when he found that some of his privileges had been taken over by Traverse. He decided, however, to take stock of his resources, and to see whether he was in a position to marry within the immediate future.

The stock-taking was not satisfactory. Most of the securities left by his father had depreciated in value, and taxes had accumulated on his property. This knowledge jarred him, for he could not ask Grace Moore to become Mrs. John Dean until he was financially secure enough to give her a home equal to the one she would leave, and all the comforts and conveniences that went with it. To do otherwise, especially because of the way Leesville would see it, would not be fair.

It was at that time that Whitelaw Hay, a broker whom John had met on one of his trips to New York, called his attention to a company that was being formed to put a new type of electric lamp on the market. Hay had often recommended deals to Dean, but he, not being speculatively inclined, had never paid attention to the broker's advice. This time, however, the information about the new company—especially as Hay, while guarded in his statements, intimated that the profits would be large, and, what was more important, almost immediate—held a strong appeal.

Dean investigated to the best of his ability, and, satisfied as to the soundness of the undertaking and the responsibility of the men behind it, decided to make a large investment. The funds at his disposal were not sufficient. In the vault, however, were considerable amounts of stocks and bonds, placed in his care because he was the son of his father. He consulted the list, and separated the negotiable securities from the non-negotiable.

There followed an argument with his conscience, for the thing he purposed doing

was not exactly in keeping with his ethics. In the midst of this he received a telegram from Hay, saying that unless he acted at once the opportunity would be lost. Then he decided that his own property was more than ample security for the trust funds, and bought a thousand shares.

When another telegram came from Hay, telling him that the organization was complete, and that there had already been offers for the stock at heavy advances, John Dean drove Grace Moore out to the Leesville Country Club and assisted her to board the Redwing. When they were around the point, and out of sight of those on the veranda, he brought the boat up into the wind, and, without preamble or warning, asked her to marry him.

Tears came into her brown eyes, and he knew that her answer would not be the one he expected. He was right. She was very gentle, yet firm. She appreciated him as a friend, enjoyed being in his company, and trusted him implicitly, but she could not be his wife.

"I don't know why, Jack, but I just can't," she concluded, her voice trembling.

"Traverse" was in his mind, but he did not speak. Instead, he brought the Redwing about, and the landing he made at the club float was as near perfect as any he had ever achieved.

II

Not until long after midnight did John Dean fully realize that Grace Moore would never be his wife. Hours of pacing the floor, after his return to his home, dissipated some of the numbness that had settled on him; and when the anæsthesia of the shock had died away sufficiently for the full pain of his hurt to be sensed, it was almost more than he could bear.

He knew now that in the drifting years the attraction that had drawn him to Grace in his boyhood had grown stronger and stronger until it was a part of the very fiber of his being. It was in the darkness, with despair clutching at him, that the truth forced itself into his consciousness. Life without Grace Moore, full though it might be, was hardly worth while.

The blow was all the more crushing because it was the first of his entire life. From his earliest remembrance, he had only had to wish for a thing and it was his. For him, until that day, life had held no disappointments. There had been no struggle, no conflict, no deflection of the even current. In school and the university, he had never really studied. When he entered on his professional career, clients sought him out without effort on his part. This inexperience served now only to heighten his despair.

Sitting down, at last, because of the insistence of bodily weariness, he watched the east redden, but the dawn brought him no promise. Not once did it occur to him to make another attempt, to endeavor to win Grace by siege. In the past her decisions had always been final, and he regarded it as useless to attempt to alter them. Grace Moore knew her own mind, and, knowing her own mind, she certainly knew her heart.

Still, with the breaking of the light, some of John's self-confidence returned, his pride the stimulant. It would be necessary for him to wear a mask, for, if his feelings were revealed, they would be discussed in every home in Leesville. Inevitably it would be known that Grace Moore had refused him; but if he could disguise his lacerations, he would escape humiliation.

That thought completed, he pulled himself together, took a cold shower, and went to his office. On the way there, walking along Main Street, he considered leaving town, but he rejected that idea for two reasons. For one thing, to do so would be to confess being hard hit. Besides, his interests were all in Leesville, in his heart he was of Leesville.

Quite as usual, John read his mail. Then, there being nothing on the calendar for the day, again quite as usual, he accepted an invitation from Bob Weeks, went out to the club, and shot eighteen holes. By that time so well did he have himself in hand that he even lowered his record by one stroke.

After luncheon he played the customary three rubbers of bridge with Rod Price, Bob Coutard, and Tom Lockhart. During the game Price brought up the matter of the relative speed of Paul Lachlin's Peggy and the Redwing. Though Dean regarded the proposed handicap as excessive, he accepted the challenge, and beat the Peggy handily, despite the light wind.

In the evening, again at the club, he encountered Grace and Traverse. None of them indicated that anything out of the ordinary had happened; but when John Dean retired that night, though desperate-

ly weary from the strain, he did not close his eyes until utterly exhausted, and then his sleep was fitful and filled with dreams.

In the succeeding dull days, he congratulated himself on having won a victory; but fate had not finished him.

A telegram was brought to him, and, thinking that Hay was telling him of another and better offer for the stock and advising a sale, he threw it on his desk unopened. William Traverse had just driven by in a new automobile—a car of an expensive make—and at his side was Grace Moore. The sale of the stock could make but little difference to John, for there was no prospect of marriage; so he turned again toward the window and watched the street, though he was seeing inward and not outward.

It was more than an hour later when he tore open the yellow envelope. He had been right—the message was from Hay; but its purport was not that which he had imagined. Instead, the significant words were:

Patents—infringement—complete collapse.

But to John Dean the message read thus:

The great-great-grandson of Enos Dean, the first lawyer of Leesville, is a thief!

He might have recovered from the initial blow, but the second was too terrific.

There was no urge of haste. Those securities had lain in the vault for years; very probably they would not be inquired about for many months. For that he was thankful; for the plan which had come into his mind, and which had assumed definite shape when he knew there was no escape, must have the appearance of accident. Not that it mattered to John Dean, but he was thinking of Leesville and of Grace Moore.

He had to wait until Sand Lake broke white.

To be ready, since the summer storms sprang up suddenly and abated almost as quickly, necessitated spending hours at the Country Club, which was quite in accord with his program of recent years. Several times he met Grace Moore, which tried him greatly, but he chatted with her as if everything were moving along in its accustomed routine, though he never asked her to dance. It was evident that she wished to speak to him when no one else was within hearing, but he gave her no opportunity.

At last, in the presence of Price, Lockhart, and Lachlin, she asked him to take her out in the Redwing. Under the circumstances, he could not refuse.

"We can still be friends, Jack," she said. "I want to thank you for being a man."

For an instant he was thrilled, but only for an instant, for immediately afterward he was shaken by a chill. If those words indicated that the chapter was not closed, it was too late. He was a thief!

He brought the Redwing about so quickly that the little craft heeled sharply, and her low gunwale was almost submerged.

"It's all right," he replied jerkily. "It's all right, Grace. Leesville will never know."

And she, not cognizant of what was in his mind, smiled at him.

On the fifth day, in the middle of the last rubber, with Price endeavoring to make four spades on six trumps without the ace and king, the light breeze that had been blowing died away suddenly. A small black cloud, growing larger rapidly, appeared in the southwest; and then, as they moved from the porch into the building, a ridge of white was seen far down the lake.

Afterward, there was questioning as to just what had been said that caused Dean to take the Redwing out at such a time. None could recall the start of the argument, though they agreed that some remark had been made, the precise wording of which could not be ascertained, but which Dean took as a reflection either on the seaworthy qualities of his sailing canoe, or his seamanship, or his courage.

Before they quite sensed his intention he had the Redwing into the water. Shaking off Reggie Decker and Claude Hand, who would have held him back, he sent the frail craft away from the float and out into the foam—for then the storm had broken, and the waves were running high.

"I'll be back in half an hour," he shouted, his words coming to the group over the roar of the wind, and the smile on his face plainly visible.

The last person he saw was Grace Moore. She had just alighted from a car, and with her was a man whose head resembled flame.

John Dean smiled and waved his hand at her. Grace, her face whitening, called something that he could not catch, for the wind was increasing—just as he, skilled in reading cloud signs, knew that it would in-

crease, until it blew in such great gusts that no craft could put out to follow him.

That evening the Redwing was found overturned near the center of the lake. Twenty-four hours later, John Dean's cap was picked up. It was useless to drag for the body, for the water was too deep.

Sand Lake never gave up its dead.

III

WHEN John Dean sailed the Redwing up Sand Lake in the gale, he was fully conscious that the odds were against him in a game in which his life was the stake; yet he felt no misgivings, his conviction being that whatever happened would make little difference.

Should he lose, that which he wished Leesville to believe would be the truth. Should he win, he would assume a new identity, and the past would be completely obliterated.

He had taken careful thought of both contingencies, and had so made his preparations that, whatever the outcome, Leesville could draw but one conclusion—that he had met with an accident. While deep in a thicket, far enough from the club to be beyond observation, even with a strong glass, he had secreted clothing and other articles, exerting care to include only things that could in no way be traced to him should his cache ever be discovered.

Handling the Redwing expertly, he sailed until he reached the spot selected. Then, making sure that he was unobserved, he jibbed the frail craft, and, as it went over, dived deeply.

The sudden chill numbed him, and made him inefficient until his exertions restored circulation. Then he swam slowly, conserving his strength, for he had more than two miles to go, and there was a hard fight ahead of him. His clothing impeded his progress greatly—his shoes seemed to weigh tons—but he did not dare divest himself of any garment save those that would naturally float away; for to have done so would have damaged the verities.

So, with his breath rasping in his throat and the waves slapping his eyes, he clawed his way along at a snail's pace until his feet touched the bottom and he managed to drag himself ashore. So greatly had the struggle sapped his strength, and so spent was he, that he dropped to the sand and lay there panting for many minutes, careless even as to possible discovery. Reviving finally, he tore off his water-soaked clothing and sank it, along with his old life, into a convenient slough.

As Philip Brent, John Dean reached Detroit just after the city had awakened from its sleep of years, the motor car being the alarm clock that had so roused it that it had changed from an overgrown stove manufacturing village to a metropolis animated, busy, and with a *tempo* so swift that it seemed to vibrate.

John Dean had chosen Detroit with the same care that he had taken in working out the other details of his plan.

Naturally enough, in the beginning, when he had first begun to consider ways and means of extricating himself from the dilemma in which he had become involved, he had given serious thought to New York, believing that amid the metropolitan millions he would be safe from his past. The idea was dismissed quickly, however. New York was in too close proximity to Leesville. Almost daily, residents of Leesville went to the great city. In walking along Broadway, with all thoughts of Leesville erased from his mind, he had often encountered home folks. For that reason, the millions would be but a poor screen.

Then he thought of Chicago; but Chicago was eliminated almost as hurriedly. Chicago was hundreds of miles away, yet it had a good many connections with Leesville people. Reggie Decker's brother lived in Chicago, and had occasionally made the long trip. Then, too, Tom Lockhart, who was a traveling salesman, called on trade in Chicago. Many others, fully conversant with John Dean's personal appearance, found it necessary to travel West at not infrequent intervals; and in the case of a man endeavoring to hide, the law of averages did not always hold true.

Finally Detroit came into his mind. Detroit, though he knew that it had grown into a city, was, so far as Leesville was concerned, off the beaten track. Think as hard as he would, John Dean—or Philip Brent—could not recall that any of his acquaintances had ever visited Detroit, the motor car factories of that city not having reached the proportions that they were later to attain, and the term "F. O. B. Detroit" having little significance, if any, in Leesville at that time; so Detroit had become his choice.

Walking along Fort Street, after leaving the Union Depot, Philip Brent did not re-

gret his selection. In the dash and alertness of the Michigan city, strongly emphasized by the stagnation of Leesville, he found a stimulation which increased to such an extent, as he neared the Pontchartrain Hotel, where he registered, that he felt as if a metamorphosis had occurred within him. He seemed to have shaken off his lethargy and detachment, and his mental processes had so quickened that in all verity he was no longer John Dean.

Still, in his room, looking down at the constant stream of automobiles and trolleys crossing the Campus, he fell to questioning himself. In the midst of his interrogation he was conscious that, careful as his calculations had been, there was error in them. He had succeeded in escaping from Leesville and from his entanglements. He had become Philip Brent—his hand had moved easily and naturally when he wrote the signature; yet he had not made an end of John Dean, for John Dean was still alive, and was accusing him of having made a mistake. This was bitter, for behind the accusation leveled at Philip Brent by John Dean were generations of upright men—stern, most of them, but all of them just—the Deans who had occupied offices on Main Street, an unbroken line that went back to Enos Dean, who had come to Leesville at the invitation of Sherman Lee. There was no odium attached to their memories. No one could point his finger at any of them; and then, after one hundred and fifty years, a Dean had violated the code.

Far better, he thought, as the traffic current faded before his eyes, and far more in keeping with the traditions of his family, had he remained and faced, Dean fashion, whatever punishment might have been meted out, whether the contumely of the community or actual incarceration in a penal institution. If he had remained and paid his obligation to the law, he might have attempted restitution; but by running away he had made that impossible. Furthermore, instead of atonement, to his one crime of larceny by conversion he had added another—that of fraud.

As he stood at the window, with the hands of the clock on the tower of the dingy old City Hall across the street showing twenty-six minutes past two, his thoughts were clearer than they had been in weeks. At that moment he knew that in making his elaborate plans to deceive Leesville he had not shown sanity. The disasters he had undergone had caused mental aberration, a deviation from the normal. Otherwise, he would not be in Detroit.

The hour of the day impinged itself on his consciousness and switched his line of thought. At three o'clock there was a train for Leesville—he had studied time tables thoroughly—and twenty hours after boarding it he would be back home. Of a sudden, he decided to take that train.

An inhibition intervened, however. Leesville believed him dead—believed he had lost his life in an accident. To reveal the hoax would be to outrage the community, to make his name anathema. That was a complication which rendered impossible what otherwise would have been a simple act, for he could easily have explained his brief absence.

Still, he tried to adduce ways and means, and struggled with no result while the moments slipped away until the clock struck three times, and it was too late for the train.

With the deep strokes, he was again Philip Brent, and Philip Brent found the answer to the problem. He would continue to be Philip Brent, and would remain dead so far as Leesville was concerned; but there was nothing to prevent Philip Brent from making such restitution as might be possible. He need not go to Leesville to do it. He could remain in Detroit, where he would not be detected.

As Philip Brent, he could not regain Grace Moore; but he believed that he was resigned to the loss of the one woman of his life, for even as he saw her with Traverse at the club, as he was apparently sailing to his doom, he had surrendered her. Nor could he rehabilitate John Dean in the eyes of Leesville, but he could salve his own conscience.

How he would work this out was not clear to him at the moment. In considering his economic future, no thought had been given to that which he would leave behind, his mind having been too full of other matters; nor was there any necessity for immediate determination. Time in plenty remained—he smiled grimly—for death was long. First of all, he must settle the question of his livelihood.

The law obviously was impossible. To practice in Detroit, it would be necessary to be admitted to the bar—a matter comparatively simple for John Dean, but im-

possible for Philip Brent. Neither could he obtain employment as a lawyer's clerk, for references were essential, and Philip Brent was too newborn to possess any. However, though all he knew was the law, he was not worried by his disbarment.

Business had always appealed to him to such an extent that in Leesville, had not tradition been too strong, he might have ventured into pursuits involving buying and selling, rather than a professional life. None of the Deans had been business men, in the strict sense of the term, in so far as the family records revealed; but some of them, including his own father, had shown great shrewdness in deals in which they had engaged as side lines, and he held it probable that he had inherited some of their ability.

Hence, for his new life, he had planned a business career, though such a fine point as its exact nature had not been determined, for he had resolved to leave that to be decided after reaching Detroit and looking over the opportunities it offered. He did not have a great amount of capital, but he had brought with him all the cash he could scrape together. Some of his clients, after their astonishment had worn off, had been a little nettled by his unusual insistence on payment for services rendered.

In the past, while he was still John Dean, he would have spent much time mulling this over, but the change that had taken place within him was manifest when he heard the clock strike. It was as if the gong was a summons to labor, an order to go down into the street and look about him, that he might make a beginning.

He walked along Woodward Avenue, a part of the crowd, yet with no one paying him the slightest attention. Each distinct human unit was so intent on its own affairs that it elbowed him out of the way, or trampled on his feet, without even casting a glance on him. He had experienced the same thing in New York, but a difference was observed here. In Detroit it was done with a fine carelessness, the oblivion of self-concentration. In New York it seemed to be done with cold intent.

Before the Majestic Building, in an eddy in the throng caused by the influx from Michigan Avenue, he noted a stand whereon were displayed newspapers from various cities in the country. A sudden hunger for tidings from his old home smote him. Shouldering his way to the man in charge, it was on the tip of his tongue to ask for the Leesville *Bulletin;* but he checked himself in time, and requested a New York paper, which was detached from its companions and handed to him with a quick, deft movement.

With the journal in his hand, retreating until he was within the shelter of the building, he saw that he had chanced to get the familiar edition which John Dean had bought each day in Leesville. At the sight, such a wave of nostalgia engulfed him that the paper trembled as he tried to read. Nor was it only homesickness that caused his agitation, for mingled with it was the premonition that he was about to read his own obituary.

Scanning the first page with uneasy eyes and with his breathing constricted, he found no news from Leesville; but on the second page he encountered a brief dispatch. With the constriction increasing, he read:

> John Dean, prominent young attorney, member of one of Leesville's oldest families, one of the board of governors of the Leesville Country Club, and a well-known sportsman, was accidentally drowned to-day when his sailing canoe was overturned in Sand Lake during a storm. The body has not been recovered.

That last line was magnified before his eyes. He was not on one of Woodward Avenue's busiest corners, but was fighting the waves of the lake, his breath growing shorter and shorter, and in his mind the thought that perhaps, after all, he would not make the shore. Never again would he see Sand Lake! He crumpled the paper in his hand and dropped it on the sidewalk, stepping out briskly, as if he were attempting to escape from a shadow.

A short distance away he ran into a well dressed young man, who passed on quickly without apologizing. The incident was of such slight moment that it but dimly interrupted the reverie in which he was picturing the clubhouse at Sand Lake, his friends on the porch, and Grace Moore with William Traverse.

His abstraction continued even as he stepped into State Street without looking to the right or left. The shout of the traffic policeman and the scream of a woman aroused him. Bearing down on him was a mighty motor truck, the wheels just about to claim him.

Only the litheness of his muscles saved him, for there was no time for a command to be issued by his brain. His sudden

spring took him to safety, but so imminent was the peril that he felt the vehicle brush him even as he leaped. With perspiration issuing from his pores, his face burning, he quickly lost himself in the hordes of shoppers—not quickly enough, however, to escape the remarks of the officer; but traffic flowed on as usual, hastening across the intersection as rapidly as if moments were of more importance than human life.

Somewhat shaken, and with his introspection ended, he continued his stroll, crossing Grand Circus Park and going on until he came to the automobile salesrooms. The glittering, massive motor cars in the windows held his attention, yet in his inner consciousness there was a sense of unreality. Here were hundreds and hundreds of persons moving about hurriedly, engaging in their occupations, driving cars up and down the street, making purchases or sales, and to them Leesville had never given a thought!

Again came a quickening of the blood, a desire to accomplish, and with it a sensation of freedom. For the first time in his life the restrictions of tradition were lifted, and he could do just as he desired.

He was surprised when he found that it was dinner time, and that he was hungry. At his hotel, he ordered recklessly and ate heartily. When the waiter presented the check—the prices reminded him of New York—he reached for his wallet, as he desired to have a large bill changed, his supply of small currency being low. To his consternation, though he was certain he had placed it in his inside coat pocket, he could not find it.

With fumbling fingers he continued to feel his pockets over and over again, his disquiet growing greater rapidly, for in that container was practically every dollar he had in the world.

"Are you registered at the hotel, sir?" asked the waiter, who had remained at his elbow.

"Yes," stammered Brent. "I—I—"

"Just sign the check, then, and it will be charged to your room."

With a sigh of relief he did so, for he feared that a newcomer in a strange city would be cast into the street, if it were found that he did not have sufficient funds to pay for the food he had consumed.

Though acknowledging the futility of the effort, he went through his baggage. Then he remembered the young man who had jostled him on the street. No doubt his pocket had been picked.

He would have to make his start as Philip Brent penniless and without even a change of clothing, since, being unable to pay his hotel bill, it would be necessary to leave his baggage until he earned enough money to reclaim it.

IV

The loss of his money caused Philip Brent to find that he possessed something which, so far as he knew, had not been an attribute of John Dean. This was a sense of humor. When at last he abandoned his search as useless, instead of mourning, he sat on the edge of the bed and laughed heartily, the situation taking on the aspects of comedy.

He had made elaborate plans, had risked his life in putting them into execution, and had accomplished the hardest part—escaping from the vicinity of Leesville without being recognized; and then the light fingers of a pickpocket had muddled everything!

Humorously, he saw himself facing the hotel manager, telling his story and attempting to overcome the man's natural incredulity. The humor lay in the fact that the complication was entirely unexpected; but some of the fun vanished when he followed his thought to a further conclusion. He might even be jailed for attempting to defraud a hotel—which, in the eyes of the law, was not a mere misdemeanor, but a felony. Yet he was still smiling when he turned the contents of his pocket out on the white spread of the bed, and counted what money he had left. Six dollars and six cents—an amount insufficient by at least two dollars to meet his obligation to the Pontchartrain.

That discovery gave him pause for a moment. He had hoped that by parting with his last dime he might be able to pay the bill, and thus escape the possibility of court proceedings, which might result in the bringing to life of John Dean; for the law has a habit of digging up the secrets of those who come within its toils.

There being no alternative, with the best grace possible he gathered his toilet articles from the chiffonier, placed them in his bag, strapped his suit case, and sought the manager's office. He explained his plight frankly, proffered what money he had, and offered to leave his baggage as security for the balance.

"Not necessary," was the surprising reply. "Send us the money when you get your draft."

"But I intended to locate in Detroit—to engage in business. The money I lost was my entire capital."

"What do you intend to do now?"

"The only thing possible—go to work."

"Drop in when it's convenient."

Brent again tendered the six dollars.

"Keep it—you'll have to eat until you draw some pay. You can leave your suit case. That's security enough. Your bill is only eight eighty."

Brent, somewhat dazed but mightily relieved, attempted to thank the hotel man; but the manager indicated that he was too busy to listen, though, in response to Brent's inquiry, he did mention the address of a reasonably priced lodging house.

Brent was up early the next day. He was entirely resigned to the thought of manual labor, the only occupation open to one without references. During his walk from the station, along Fort Street, he had noted several employment agencies, and at one of these he stopped. Outside, waiting their turn to enter, was a crowd of roughly dressed men, the throng so large that more than an hour elapsed before he reached the man behind the desk.

"Nothing doing!" answered the agent shortly, when Brent inquired as to the possibility of a place. "Only men wanted."

"Too well dressed for rough labor," thought Brent, as he edged his way out, his sense of humor still uppermost.

The matter, however, was of importance to him. He had to find some sort of work immediately. His total capital at the moment was only a little more than a dollar, as he had been obliged to pay for his room in advance.

Pondering the problem, he made his way slowly toward another agency, looking into the stores as he went, and wondering if it were possible for any one without references to obtain a clerking position. The window of the Urban and Suburban Realty Company, filled with posters showing homes set amid green lawns, caught his eye and stopped him. In one corner was a smaller sign—"Men Wanted."

Moved by a sudden impulse, he passed through the door.

To him it seemed that the room into which he went was a giant separator. One stream of men was passing out of a door that led to the street, and another stream—which, judging by the expressions of those who formed it, was composed of those who had succeeded in passing through the first screen—was traveling toward the rear and disappearing through another door. When his turn came to face the judge, a few questions were shot at him by a man who he felt was appraising him swiftly and expertly, and then, not a little to his surprise, he was not rejected.

Behind that last door was a school. Here Philip Brent, still at sea, found himself in an atmosphere of high tension, and amid the dynamics of applied psychology—the application being to the obtaining of signatures to contracts.

Though at first inclined to smile and to hold himself superior, within less than half an hour Brent found creeping into him a belief in the development described by the eloquent speakers. He began to feel assured that by selling lots in that particular subdivision he would not only be benefiting himself, but would be conferring a favor upon those who bought from him; for, just as he would make commissions, so would the buyers themselves reap large profits from future resales.

Under the influence of the lecturers, whose statements were reënforced with maps and Board of Commerce statistics, he visualized Detroit as a lusty youth growing so rapidly that he was bursting through his clothing, and his trousers were high above his shoe tops. The city's population was more than half a million; before the next census period was reached, it would pass a million. Obviously, every one who came to Detroit to live added to the potential value of real estate, for the newcomers had to be housed; and there was the Urban and Suburban subdivision within easy walking distance of the great Wood Motor Works, available to supply the urgent need of ground for homes. So Philip Brent and the others assembled there were told, and so Philip Brent believed.

Water, gas, drains, and electricity were already in. The right of way for the extension of the street car line, which would run through the center of the property, was graded, and the steel was on the ground. The streets were improved, the shade trees set out. The spirit of those describing the project was so infectious that Brent was actually impatient to start.

He was sent out with a salesman named

Henry Blair. Blair was a big-muscled, frank-faced young man, who had a magnetism and an openness that drew Brent to him immediately. During the street car ride they became so well acquainted that Blair laid his hopes and ambitions before Brent.

With Blair, his present employment was merely a foundation. He intended to remain with the Urban and Suburban only long enough to obtain the rudiments of the business. Then he would open an office of his own, for he had a little capital. A great amount wasn't necessary, though the more one possessed, the more rapidly would success be attained.

" Detroit property is moving fast, but in two years this pace will seem slow," he continued. " Wish I'd seen it coming three years ago! I've turned some deals, and made good money, but nothing to what I'd have made if I'd been married sooner. Ethel—she's my wife—was the one who made me chuck my job and go into this. She's got a real business head. You'll have to come out to the house some night and meet her. She used to be a stenographer in Collins's office. You know who Collins is?"

Brent shook his head.

" You must be a stranger in Detroit! He's one of the biggest operators in town. The Urban and Suburban—which, if what we've just been told is true, will make us both rich—is really James Collins. He started with a few acres of wild flowers, and—well, he doesn't have to worry about anything now. This is his third big development in the last two years."

They had reached their destination.

" There he is now," said Blair. " That's Jim Collins in person."

Brent saw a large man in a light gray suit, his white corded silk vest immaculate, gold eyeglasses attached to the lapel of his coat, his highly polished black shoes surmounted by gray spats, and over his arm a heavy cane. His thick gray hair swept back from his forehead like a mane. His gray mustache was neatly trimmed, and his deep-set blue eyes had a look of keenness. He was smoking an oily black cigar. As Brent and Blair passed him, he glanced at them very casually, and apparently without interest.

At the office, a man who introduced himself as " Mr. Kelley " took charge of Blair and Brent, gave them a few final instructions, and then turned over to them " prospects " who were waiting for disengaged salesmen.

Brent was not entirely pleased with those assigned to him—a middle-aged man and woman, plainly dressed, and evidently man and wife. Silently they trotted along behind him as he took them from lot to lot, explaining why the property was bound to increase in value, and why an immediate purchase should be made. Judging by their lack of response, they either did not hear him or were paying no attention. Finally, having run out of arguments, he merely led them farther and farther from the office, continuing until the whole affair became ridiculous, and he saw himself an actor in a farce.

They were nearly at the limits of the property when the couple stopped suddenly and the woman nodded at the man, after carefully consulting the numbers on the stakes.

" Ve take dese t'ree," said the husband.

To Brent this was only a continuation of the farce, though he went back with them to the office and witnessed the payment of the deposit to Kelley. That he had actually made a sale and earned a commission did not seem to be possible.

" Your first sale?" a gruff voice inquired, and he swung and faced Collins.

" Yes," replied Brent.

Collins turned his back without making any comment.

His first week on the subdivision netted Brent three hundred dollars in commissions. He was well satisfied with his accomplishment, though Blair had earned more, for never had his earnings in a similar stretch of time approximated that amount.

There was just one drawback to the peace of mind that had come with the settlement of his economic problem, and that was the constantly recurring thought of Leesville. When this came to him, he could not continue to be Philip Brent, but slipped back into the character of John Dean; and when he was John Dean, he could not rest, for John Dean's crime held itself before his eyes in all its enormity. To banish John Dean, to keep him in the background and therefore less troublesome, he threw himself into his work with an intensity that excluded everything else.

Instead of waiting for customers to come to the property, he set about finding them for himself, after hours. He would ring doorbells at random, and, when he could

not obtain an interview, would leave literature and cards, making notes which enabled him to call again. In this way he increased his sales record materially. He also found that by keeping himself busier he could dim the past—not entirely, but sufficiently to give him a certain degree of mental peace.

Blair's invitation to come out to dinner slipped from his recollection, though at the time it had struck him as strange; for in Leesville invitations to meals were not extended on first meetings. But Blair, evidently, had not only meant it when he uttered it, but remembered it, for he alluded to it during the second week of Brent's new work—a time when they had formed an informal partnership, one turning a "prospect" over to the other when he believed he could not close.

"The first rainy Sunday we'll have you to dinner out to the house," he said. "I've spoken to Ethel about you, and she wants to meet you; but you'll have to look out for her! As I told you, she has a business head, and if you're not on your guard she'll sell you something; but she's the best cook in Detroit!"

Brent found that the Blair home was a cottage located in the midst of a rapidly developing section. Heartily sick of such restaurant fare as he had eaten, the meal satisfied a craving that had existed for days; and at its conclusion he was ready to subscribe to Blair's assertion as to his wife's culinary skill.

While Mrs. Blair—a woman of medium height, with alert brown eyes, wavy brown hair, and an intelligent face—cleared away the dishes, the two men sat on the porch and smoked, the steady downpour of rain providing an accompaniment to their conversation. So close did the contact seem that Brent felt as if he had known Blair for years.

"I don't actually own this shack," said Blair. "I'm buying it on contract. When we get our price, we'll sell, stick our equity in something else, and keep on following that program until by and by we'll be able to build exactly what we want."

Mrs. Blair joined them, and the discussion shifted to a lot a few blocks down the street.

"It's a buy," said Blair; "only a thousand dollars, but we're all tied up."

"Why don't you take it, Mr. Brent?" asked Ethel Blair.

"Haven't the money."

"A hundred dollars down would swing it," said Blair, tossing his cigarette into the street.

"Is that possible?" asked Brent.

"Yes. If you grab it, I'll guarantee to take it off your hands inside of ninety days."

"To whom shall I go?"

"Me," responded Ethel Blair. "When I saw we couldn't make the deal ourselves, I got the owner to let me handle it."

"But I've only ten dollars with me"—after paying the Pontchartrain debt, Brent had opened a bank account—"and—"

"That's enough for a deposit, and you can give me the rest on Monday," said Ethel Blair, producing a fountain pen.

In Leesville such a deal would have taken days, but here it was only a matter of minutes. Not being John Dean any longer, Brent handed her a ten-dollar bill and accepted the receipt.

On Monday afternoon Mrs. Blair hunted him up on the subdivision. He took his check book from his pocket, but she stopped him.

"I didn't come out here for your check," she said briskly. "What I want to know is, will you take fifteen hundred dollars for your property?"

"My property?"

"Yes—that deposit is binding. Your lot is fifty feet wide, and therefore an apartment site. A builder wants it. I advise selling, because he'll pay all cash."

"Whatever you think best, Mrs. Blair."

"I thought you'd accept, so I took a down payment, subject to your approval. My commission is seventy-five dollars. Here is the balance due you."

The unusualness of the entire transaction and the suddenness with which it was consummated almost took away Brent's breath. A profit of four hundred and twenty-five dollars in less than twenty-four hours, on a total investment of but ten! He was familiar with marginal operations on the stock market, but had never engaged in them, regarding them as gambling. This real estate deal was a different thing.

Feeling grateful, he endeavored to divide with Ethel Blair, but she refused to take his money.

"That wouldn't be right," she insisted, her face flushing. "I've made two commissions on that one lot now. What I've earned, I'll use for a down payment on an-

other lot in that same neighborhood, and I'm satisfied."

"Do the same thing for me," he returned quickly, handing her the money. "Use your own judgment."

"Glad to do it. I know a bargain, and I'll make two commissions again—one when I buy for you, and one when I sell. By the way, Mr. Brent, I wish you would come out to dinner again with Hal the next rainy Sunday. My sister will be there—she's coming from Chicago to live with us, and I want you to meet her."

V

Born and reared in Leesville, where tradition did not include woman in the business world, and with the impress of the old town still on him, though he had made efforts to throw it off, business instinct in a woman so keen that it caused her to sell real estate to him while he was a guest at her table was a disturbing as well as a novel experience to Philip Brent.

The deal in which he had engaged had been the most profitable of his career, but he could not quite reconcile himself to what he regarded as an abrupt departure from the normal, and he regretted having even tentatively accepted the invitation that she extended. He did not know that when Ethel Blair sold him that fifty-foot lot, and he turned over his profits to her, he reached another turning point in his career—such an important turning point that the incident, trivial on the face of it, was of vital moment to him.

In regard to Ethel's sister he had no curiosity whatsoever. So far as women were concerned, no emotions had been stirred in him since the day when Grace Moore told him that she could not be his wife. Her refusal had either stunned or killed something within him, and it had not revived.

Grace had been the one woman of his life, and he did not believe himself capable of caring for any other. In the excitement of his departure from Leesville, in the trick he had played on the town, and in the hot eagerness with which he had thrown himself into his new work, together with the change of scene and the vivid life of Detroit, his hurt had lost much of its sensitiveness. While day by day he saw more and more clearly the mistake he had made, he was more calm in his acceptance of the situation.

His mind generally ran on but one track. His great desire was to accumulate enough money to repay his obligation to Leesville. That done, he could work out his life to the final detail, though he did not expect that his future would be shared by any woman. And though he had pondered the matter at length, and was sure that he could accumulate the necessary funds much more quickly than by engaging in any mercantile business, he had not definitely devised the ways and means.

Henry Blair was responsible, in great measure, for lifting Brent out of himself, for his attaining the power to review the past without being torn by emotion. He liked Blair immensely. Henry was a man who wore well, and who brought other men closer to him by association. His breezy frankness was a part of the explanation—a frankness that led him to discuss his personal affairs with Brent freely and without concealment.

Often Brent wished he could be equally candid; for, while his new friend was not prying in any sense of the word, innocent questions and even allusions often drove him to evasions.

It was this same openness that changed Brent's attitude toward Mrs. Blair, and made him see her in a different light. He could never recall, afterward, what had shifted the conversation that took place one evening—when, their work being over for the day, they were on their way back from the subdivision—to Ethel Blair and her activities.

"Remember, Phil, I warned you," said Blair. "She has a great head for business, and her eyes are wide open. I knew she'd make money for you, or I wouldn't have recommended that buy; but she's a queer combination. She may strike you as being all business, but the fact is that she hates business, especially real estate. Honestly, I believe one of the main reasons why she married me when she did was to get out of Collins's office. She'd rather scallop paper for her pantry shelves than turn the biggest deal in town; but she's true blue all the way through, and that's why she's scouting around for stray dollars instead of working out new cake recipes. She has a hunch that if I had enough capital, I'd make good. The more she works, the quicker we'll get the capital together. Then I'll go it alone, and she'll return to her gas range. Some men might not be willing to have their wives do that. I

wasn't, myself, until I got her psychology. Then she became the spur that makes me take hurdles when I want to balk. Whenever I've got an extra tough prospect, I think of her while I tow him around Jim Collins's wild flower patch, and I hang on to him until he's putting his name on the dotted line. I'm the luckiest cuss in Detroit to have a partner like her!"

"You are lucky," agreed Brent soberly.

"And so are you, to give your loot to her to handle. I'll bet four bits she has something good in sight right now, though I won't know until it's all over. She says I have enough on my mind without worrying about her."

It was because of this conversation that Brent was again a guest at the Blair home when next it rained on a Sunday. Sitting across the table from Betty Mason, Ethel's sister, he groped blindly in his mind for a reason why one outwardly totally dissimilar should bring back to him a vivid picture of Grace Moore. He was so much engrossed in thoughts of Leesville that he could not keep track of the thread of the conversation, though Ethel Blair, as fragments that registered in his mind told him, was speaking of a deal in which he was involved.

Betty Mason was of much smaller stature than Grace Moore. Her features were more delicately molded, her face was more oval, and her skin, though tanned, was finer in texture. Her eyes were brown, but in them were none of the shadows of a secluded pool. Instead, there was a dancing light. Her hands were small, her fingers tapering; yet in some indescribable manner she communicated to him a vision that made him see the Leesville girl.

"A two-family flat," Mrs. Blair was saying, "can be bought for fifteen hundred down—carrying charges only a hundred a month."

"It isn't her hair, it isn't her eyes," Brent was thinking. "What can it be, anyway?"

"The lower apartment will rent for sixty-five, and the upper—it has one less room—for sixty. That will practically take care of the carrying charges and the taxes. The paving's in—"

Brent did not hear the conclusion of the sentence. At that moment he had found the solution to his problem. The resemblance to Grace Moore was in Betty Mason's mannerisms, the little traits discernible only by close observation, yet in which lie similarity or dissimilarity. There emanated from Miss Mason, as from Grace Moore, an impression of a yeasty composition, unsatisfied save by action, yet behind which lay great reserve force.

"Well, what do you say, Phil?" asked Blair.

"That's just it!" exclaimed Brent, speaking his thoughts aloud.

"I thought you'd agree. Here's where the firm of Blair, Brent & Blair—alliterative and easy to remember—comes into existence. Five hundred apiece, and the profits split three ways."

"I'll give you the check right away," replied Brent, wondering what he had bought, and not caring greatly.

He was oppressed by a sense of futility. He had thought himself cured, but now he had suffered a relapse.

"How much commission will you make this time, Eth?" asked Blair.

His wife's face fell.

"Hal, when I heard of it, I was so excited that I went right to the builder and paid him a deposit without thinking about a commission," she answered, ashamed.

Brent joined in the laughter. It was a saving incident, for it brought him back from his mental wanderings. He realized that Ethel Blair was a woman, after all, a bargain uppermost in her mind!

"Real estate—is that all you Detroit people think about?" asked Betty Mason. "You haven't talked of anything else since I came."

"Oh, some talk golf," replied Mrs. Blair, giving her husband a laughing look.

"Do you play golf, Miss Mason?" asked Brent, interested immediately.

"Does she play?" It was Mrs. Blair who repeated his question. "Betty, get out your pretty cup and show it to the gentleman."

"It's only a little cup," insisted the sister, flushing and confused. "And, Mr. Brent—"

"It's a small cup, but it represents a big victory," continued Mrs. Blair. "Our little sister is the open champion of her club."

"But it's only a little club."

"That's what you said about your cup."

"I would like to see it," asserted Blair, and, somewhat reluctantly, Betty brought the trophy from her room.

Thus was a gap spanned and a common interest established. It was indeed an important Sunday for Philip Brent, though he

didn't realize it until long afterward; for on that day he continued one beginning and made another.

VI

THE real estate boom continued. Values seemed to double overnight, and the two-apartment building was sold at a net profit of three thousand dollars. By agreement, this was put into a similar but better building, and Ethel Blair did not again forget her commission.

Business increased on the subdivision. From mid forenoon until after dusk, Brent walked so many miles that he was tired enough to retire immediately on quitting; but he continued to prowl about the city at night, partly because he lacked other occupation, partly because of his interest in his work, and because he wished to clear up his obligation to Leesville.

Realizing that it would be a valuable aid in finding and calling on possible purchasers, he bought a small car. One evening, after a particularly strenuous and profitable day, he sensed the need of relaxation. Driving to the Blair home, he asked Betty Mason to go into the country with him.

Autumn was near. The air was smoky, the sky hazy. Fast motion brought a feeling of exhilaration and lightness. They did not talk much, but, with Betty beside him, Brent felt strangely at peace. He could not decide whether this was due to her companionship or to the memories that her presence invoked. He was taken out of the present and thrown, in thought, far back into the past—so far, indeed, that his great disaster was erased.

His early mornings were practically free, he remembered on the return, and he suggested that they should try to find some public links, though he knew of none in or near Detroit. Betty had heard of a farm not far out, where play was permitted for a fee.

"I haven't had a club in my hands since I came here, and I'm wild to play," she continued.

"Let's try to-morrow," replied Brent.

She agreed. They located the farm and made the necessary arrangements. The exercise did him so much good that he formed a habit of stopping for Betty and going around the nine-hole course almost every morning.

Betty Mason had a charming personality, and Brent found her more and more attractive. She laughed often, exposing white, even teeth. She possessed the rare gift of being able to sense his moods, of remaining silent when his desire was for silence, or of keeping the conversation going when by talking he could distract his mind from other matters. She often accused him of thinking of real estate while playing golf —in which she erred, for his thoughts were of Leesville and of Grace Moore.

His association with Betty gave him a new zest in life, a revival of energy that was reflected in his work for the Urban and Suburban. To what this association might lead, he had not thought. Blair had spoken of a Paul Wilde, a young Chicago broker, who came to Detroit occasionally to see Betty; but he did not indicate that there was any attachment beyond that of friendship. Even had there been, it would have made no difference, Brent told himself, for theirs was mere companionship. It could be no more than that, for he could not stop thinking of Grace Moore and Leesville.

In his third month of employment he found Collins in the office on the property, one morning, instead of Kelley.

"Brent," said Collins, "I've been keeping an eye on you, and I don't mind admitting that I think you're a comer. Kelley has quit me — gone into business for himself. Guess I'm running a school instead of selling a subdivision. He was the third to do the same thing, but I don't hold it against any of them. They've only vindicated my judgment. You'll be following suit one of these days; but Kelley's job is yours, if you want it."

Brent was so amazed that he could hardly accept the offer. Again the differentiation between Leesville and Detroit was emphasized. Collins had not asked a single question, and quite obviously had made no investigation. He was merely staking his money—the manager handled all the deposits—on his ability to judge men.

Blair was the first to congratulate Brent.

"Good boy, Phil!" he said, extending his hand, and sincerity was in his tone. "You deserve it, after all the hard plugging you've done. Your new job will take care of you this winter. When we're through here for the season, I'm going back to the bank; but in the spring—oh, boy!"

"What's behind that last expression?"

"It's up to Ethel to tell you that, for it's her party; but it will be Blair, Brent & Blair if it goes through!"

The word "party" brought a sudden thought to Brent's mind. He had accepted Blair's hospitality twice, and here was a pretext for partial repayment.

"We ought to celebrate my rise in the real estate world," he said. "How about a feed at the Pontchartrain to-morrow night—a family party?"

"So soon, Brent? And how about Wilde?"

"Oh, damn it, Hal!" Brent was embarrassed and confused. "You know what I mean—you, Ethel, Betty and I—a foursome."

"I'll put it up to Ethel. If you're not in too much of a hurry, maybe we can make it a double affair—a celebration and an announcement party."

Brent showed his displeasure.

"Don't get goaty, Phil! I wasn't thinking about an *engagement.*" Blair stressed the word. "The announcement I have in mind is the Blair, Brent & Blair deal."

Brent agreed to let Ethel Blair set the date.

When Blair laid the invitation before his wife, she introduced the relationship of Brent and her sister.

"I wonder if he's serious!" she said.

"Oh, I don't believe so," replied Blair hastily.

"Men are unobserving. They are together a great deal."

"He's a go-getter. Collins wouldn't have shoved him ahead if he wasn't."

"Betty thinks he's good-looking. So do I, except for one thing."

"What's that?"

"His nose. It's so, so—"

"His beak is a trifle large, but he can't help that."

"Where did he come from?"

"You've stopped me with that question. Never asked him. Somewhere in the East, I suppose. Not New York or Boston—his accent isn't just right. Possibly he's from New Jersey."

The entry of Betty Mason sent the conversation back to Brent's invitation.

"A week from Tuesday will be all right," said Ethel Blair.

For the dinner, Brent engaged a private dining room. It seemed to him that years had passed since he had made such arrangements at the Sand Lake Country Club. He selected the list of dishes with the greatest care, going over and over it as if it was a matter of great importance, and thinking, when he had concluded, what a simple gesture John Dean would have made in performing such a task.

It was a jolly party, though the Blairs seemed uneasy, as if they stood on the verge of letting something drop, and were repressing the inclination only with the greatest difficulty. Betty Mason did not share their excitement; and when Brent looked at her, he made a discovery—she was even more attractive in a dinner gown than out on the links.

When the last course had been cleared away, and the waiter had left, Ethel Blair, assuming the manner of a chairman, rapped on the table with a spoon.

"Order, please!" she said. "I have something of the utmost importance to lay before the meeting."

"Proceed, madam," said Brent, catching her spirit.

"It is a serious matter—a matter so serious that it involves the enormous total of fifty thousand dollars, good American money. Knowing that, Mr. Brent, shall I continue?"

Fifty thousand dollars! Five times the total of the value of the securities that John Dean had taken from the vault! Only by forcing himself to be cool could Brent remain seated. It was unreal, a nightmare!

No association of words had called up the picture that was in his mind—a picture so vivid that he wanted to dash out of the room. It was the confidence in him that his friend's wife had shown that threw him back to other days.

Then, just as suddenly, the scene changed, and the situation became humorous. He could see the quick alteration of manner, the silence, the aversion that would ensue if he were to rise and speak the words that were burning him:

"I am a thief!"

Instead of such a damning confession, he laughed.

"And you associate me with fifty thousand dollars?" he asked, as if the whole thing were a jest in which he was to assume a rôle.

Mrs. Blair became serious instantly, and, making sure they were alone, laid before him what was in her mind. A tract of thirty acres, advantageously located, was available. It had not been on the market before, because it was held by many small owners scattered all over the country. After much work, she had traced all of them and

had obtained agreements to sell. The whole deal could be handled for about ten thousand dollars—ten thousand dollars, the amount that John Dean had stolen!

"But I thought you said fifty thousand," he said, when she paused.

"Maybe more. We won't merely improve this tract and put it on the market as a subdivision. The lots we sell will have houses on them."

"Who'll build them?"

"We will. With the money obtained from the lots, we will start the building. With the down payments on the houses, we will start others. These houses will be sold on contracts, and we'll discount the contracts for cash. I figure a profit of five hundred dollars on a lot and a thousand dollars on a house."

Blair was penciling the tablecloth.

"Blair, Brent & Blair will make a real clean-up," he observed, looking at his wife with unconcealed pride. "She's worked it out to the last detail. The Union Bank will back us up to the extent of fifty per cent of the purchase price of the land. Are you in, Phil, or do we have to look around for another partner?"

The Leesville habit was still strong with Philip Brent, and he did not reply immediately. His mind was not entirely with the discussion, Betty Mason being the distraction. Still, he had head enough for mental arithmetic. Success meant the wiping out of the Leesville debt, and, with that gone, absolute freedom.

"I'm with you," he said, looking up quickly and catching the eye of Betty Mason. "It's Blair, Brent & Blair!"

"And Mason!"

Betty Mason's declaration startled Philip Brent. Under similar conditions, Grace Moore would have said exactly the same thing!

"And Mason," he added, stumbling just a trifle. "Blair, Blair, Mason & Brent."

"Good title," remarked Blair; "but where's little sister going to get her entrance fee?"

"She has it," asserted Ethel Blair. "It came to-day. It was a little cup, but a big victory. The sporting goods firm that made the clubs she used paid her two thousand, five hundred dollars for the testimonial she gave them."

So then and there the compact was sealed by a shaking of hands all around. As he retained Betty's palm just a second or so longer than those of his other two associates, Brent experienced a tingle he had not known before. As he felt it, he wondered about Paul Wilde, for Betty was not going on the links with him the next day. She expected Wilde from Chicago.

He drove them home. At Ethel's suggestion the night being wonderful, they did not take a direct route, but went out to Grosse Pointe and followed the shore of Lake St. Clair. The expanse of shallow, gray water was disquieting to Philip Brent, for it brought a vision of another lake, one deep and cold—one that never gave up its dead.

VII

In fairness to Collins, Brent informed him at once that he intended to leave his employ at the end of the winter.

"Going into business for yourself?" the veteran asked.

"Yes—and if you want to put some one else in my place now, I'm willing to go back to selling."

"I'm running a school instead of selling a subdivision. Blair told me awhile ago he wouldn't be back in the spring."

"We're going in together."

"A good team, and I wish you luck. Stay with me until you're ready to leave. If things don't work out right, you're welcome to come back. I'm too young to retire for a good many years yet."

Walking so erectly that his heavy frame did not show the weight of more than sixty years, Collins strode away.

Brent's office duties, during the winter, occupied only the normal business day, and he spent his evenings with Betty Mason—when Paul Wilde was not in town. Not that he was able to erase his love for Grace Moore; but when he was with the girl who reminded him of her, he found partial satisfaction of a need that was with him constantly.

That his attentions to Betty Mason might be construed as other than they were, never occurred to him. If he had imagined that a different construction might be placed upon them by the Blairs, or by Betty herself, he would have been much disturbed. So far as he could determine—and he had subjected himself to the strictest self-analysis — Grace Moore was still the one woman of his life. She was just as much the one woman of his life as she had been on the day when she veered the cur-

rents of his existence by telling him that she could not be his wife.

His love for Grace Moore had been a thing of such slow growth that he could not consciously discover when mere regard had changed to something deeper. That being true, he believed that all genuine love was of the same nature, being in ignorance of the flame that flashes spontaneously. Then, too, so much of the time he spent at the Blair home was occupied in conversation concerning the great venture they were about to undertake that sentiment did not intrude.

Furthermore, there was the factor of Wilde, who still came to Detroit when he could get away from his business. When he was in town, Philip Brent did not see Betty Mason, for the Chicago man claimed all her time. At first he was not disturbed when he called and found her out with Wilde; but gradually, as March neared, he began to experience a distinct feeling of loss when he did not find her at home. As Hal Blair was working in the bank, he and Brent were not associated as closely as they had been, so Brent could not ascertain when Wilde was in Detroit.

He was not jealous of Wilde. As was shown when John Dean did not resent the presence of William Traverse in the home of Grace Moore, jealousy was no part of his being, and had not entered into his regeneration. Nevertheless, with Blair, Blair, Mason & Brent incorporated, with the other preliminaries out of the way, and with only the frost in the ground preventing the beginning of operations, he was forced to admit to himself that Wilde did make a difference.

It was not love that he felt for Betty Mason, he asserted, but merely friendship. Her pleasure in sport—they had tobogganed, skated on the canals of Belle Isle, and skied among the Bloomfield Hills through the winter—was the bond between them. She was a comrade, a vivacious comrade, who kept stimulating him into accomplishment—just as Grace Moore would have stimulated him had she become his wife. When she was with Wilde, Brent's routine was interrupted.

He learned much about Wilde, and what he learned was in the other man's favor. He was the son of a rich father, but after being graduated from the university he had given his attention strictly to business. He had been involved in none of the scrapes in which so many sons of wealthy men become implicated. He was a member of the golf club in Chicago to which Betty Mason had belonged, and until she moved to Detroit—this information had come bit by bit from Betty Mason herself—they had been together very much as Brent and Grace Moore had been together.

At the earliest possible moment, Blair, Blair, Mason & Brent began the construction of their first house, Betty Mason turning the first spade of earth, and the four making a sort of rite of the proceeding. Then there was plenty to occupy Philip Brent's mind. Time after time he found that his knowledge of law was an invaluable aid in the undertaking, for he was able to settle knotty points that would otherwise have necessitated the employment of counsel, and they were finding need for every dollar that they had, and more. Still, in the main, the costs checked up well with the estimates that had been submitted.

There was a strain about the whole thing that Brent had never before experienced. He became more and more eager for success, for emancipation from the chains that his great mistake had thrown about him. This desire was particularly strong when Betty Mason was standing beside him, watching the carpenters, and endeavoring by suggestion—with no success, be it admitted—to speed their lagging movements.

But the first house was no more than roughed in before it was sold. Likewise the second; and, with the selling of the third, the success of the enterprise seemed assured. The necessary loans were negotiated, the contracts were discounted, the bills were promptly paid, and the whole undertaking was sweeping forward of its own momentum.

To Philip Brent, the change that had come to him was so abrupt that it was unreal. A year before, he had been a resident of Leesville, firm in the belief that he would be the husband of Grace Moore. A few months had elapsed, and John Dean had apparently died in Sand Lake. Then a penniless Philip Brent fared forth to seek employment; and now that same Philip Brent, a member of Blair, Blair, Mason & Brent, was about to pocket a small fortune.

Yes, in braving the waves of Sand Lake and allowing its waters to close over his past, he had taken the right course. He had lost Grace Moore, but he had found something else. The finding was more

than a sense of humor—he had found the real John Dean!

But had he? Was the real John Dean the man who carried out the traditions of his fathers, who, borne along by these traditions, had drifted and procrastinated, and who finally had been tried and found wanting? Or was the real John Dean the man who had become Philip Brent, but who still wore the Dean nose—the man who had accomplished, who, starting without a cent, had become one-fourth owner of a development that would give him the means to pay for John Dean's error and still leave him independent? Which man was John Dean, anyway? Certainly Philip Brent, for Brent was the successful one, and all the Deans were successful.

Successful! Betty Mason!

At the instant, Philip was coming out of one of the unfinished houses. It was Betty who had selected all the decorations, had attended to the interior finish, and had achieved results so striking, yet inexpensive, that the eyes of women were captivated, and those who had come merely to look went to their own homes and copied her ideas. Betty Mason! Full of vibrant energy—a woman!

Grace Moore was gone forever, and so was John Dean. That chapter was closed; he had begun the writing of a new one. Why not include romance therein? He opened his lips to call to her.

But the cry was unuttered, for suddenly he realized a complication. Paul Wilde had not been coming to Detroit so frequently of late, but this might have been due to Betty's concentration on the real estate business. Perhaps Wilde held a prior claim on her. Had William Traverse considered any claim that John Dean might have had on Grace Moore? Again he turned toward the girl.

He slipped in the clutch quickly. He would leave the question for the future. If the development was a success—

His mind turned to Leesville, and he recalled the fact that since his departure he had received not a shred of news from his old town. Leesville undoubtedly still existed, and had its being just as usual, but to Detroit its existence meant even less than Detroit had meant to Leesville.

He wondered what his friends were doing—if Grace Moore and William Traverse had been married. He presumed that they had, for Traverse, though possessed of vast patience, was not of the type to brook unnecessary delay.

Hungry for tidings of his birthplace, he stopped at the nearest news stand, purchased an evening paper, and scanned it hurriedly, with a premonition that he would read something of importance; but a thorough search failed to reveal any Leesville dispatch. Seemingly the Detroit papers were filled only with matters relating to playgrounds, the city having awakened to the need of more places of recreation for its juvenile population. Appropriations had been made, and the city council had appointed a committee to select sites.

Not interested in playgrounds, and somehow disappointed, Brent laid the paper aside and turned his attention to business matters.

For the next two weeks money poured into the treasury of Blair, Blair, Mason & Brent, and was just as quickly paid out, for they were eager to improve as much of their property as possible immediately, in order to provide for carrying charges, reduce interest, and proportionately increase their profits. As their receipts increased, so did their optimism. Then a paper was served on Henry Blair, as president of the corporation; and with that service, fortune was wrested from their hands.

What had happened was something that could not have been foreseen or guarded against. It was no fault of any member of the firm, but nevertheless it was disastrous to them all.

The clatter of the busy hammers and the snarl of the many saws were stilled. The fronts of the uncompleted houses were boarded up. The entire investment was jeopardized, and the company was helpless, for all that could be done was to await the action of the courts.

That paper was a summons in a condemnation action by the city. The municipal committee had selected the Blair, Blair, Mason & Brent property as one of the playground sites.

VIII

Disaster revealed fully to Philip Brent the characters of those with whom he was associated. When they gathered to make a recapitulation, and to find out as nearly as possible where they stood, none of them exhibited a sign of defeat. They had met with cruel setback, and there was natural disappointment; but instead of wasting

time in repining, they sought to salvage as much as they could from the wreck.

No definite conclusion could be reached, however, inasmuch as the award they would receive would be fixed by a jury after a long, tedious, and expensive threshing out of details. When finally held, the hearing might take weeks, for the cost of the property, its probable appreciation, and the improvements already made, were part of the necessary evidence. To Brent this procedure was familiar, and, without being questioned as to how he had acquired so much expert knowledge, the Blairs and Betty Mason accepted his statement and continued the analysis.

The situation was all the more intricate because they had put back practically all their earnings into the property. Furthermore, it would be necessary to make refunds, to discharge labor bills, and, when they became due, to take up the notes at the bank, all of which meant urgent need for a considerable amount of cash.

"It's mighty lucky for us that this thing, if it had to happen, came when it did," said Blair. "If it had been late in the fall, we'd be ruined completely; but if the bank will ease up a little, and if we hustle, we may be able to get by. Back to Collins for me!"

"Back to Collins," answered Brent.

"Back to handling improved property on a five per cent commission," said Ethel Blair, without a suspicion of a tremor in her voice.

"And Weaver's Golf School wants a woman instructor," said Betty Mason.

To Philip Brent the shock was not as great as it would have been had there not always been in his innermost consciousness an indefinable feeling that the development would never be brought to a successful end, that before it was concluded there would be some upset. The culmination was so closely in line with his foreboding that he might have laughed if it had not been for the Blairs; but, despite their brave front, he knew that they were too hard hit for levity.

To them, success meant much more than it could to him. True, if things had gone through as planned, he could have lifted the Leesville load immediately; but by working for Jim Collins he could do the same thing in time. To Henry and Ethel Blair, however, the expected profits would have meant a new life.

Philip Brent had come to share with Ethel the confidence she placed in her husband. With his business sense, with his energy and his personality, and with the able backing and counsel of his wife, Brent was certain that Hal Blair would have reached a high place. Now, by a turn of fate, he was sent back to a subdivision, to endeavor to wring fifty-dollar deposits from small investors, instead of becoming a member of the Real Estate Board and handling deals in which his commissions would run into the thousands.

Then, too, there was Betty Mason. Her profits would have protected her future. She was an orphan, entirely dependent on her own efforts, unless she chose to be a parasite on her sister — which, evidently, she did not intend to become, for she had left Chicago because she believed opportunities were greater in Detroit. The thousands she would have received but for the interruption of their plans would have meant safety and independence for her.

An unusual impulse attacked Brent, and, had they been alone, it is probable that it would have been translated into immediate action. Of a sudden she seemed small, helpless, buffeted about by circumstances, the victim of a wrong of some kind; and the idea that possessed him was to press her to him, and to comfort her by physical contact.

However, the thought was almost instantly arrested. Betty Mason was no weakling. Her body was composed of pliant muscles perfectly coördinated with her mind. Indeed, the synchronism was so excellent that her golf was almost as good as his, and she steadily cut down the handicap he had given her at first. In her clear eyes, even in their shaded depth, there was no hint of distress.

Collins welcomed Brent and Blair back to his organization. He was opening another subdivision, and had need for trained salesmen. He exhibited, however, some curiosity as to why they were seeking their old employment, the action of the city not having been announced in the newspapers as yet. They told him frankly, and, in telling him, gave him more information than they knew; for the brain under that gray thatch was so quick that it needed only an outline to obtain a complete picture.

Collins's new subdivision was farther out than the one on which they had first worked, and not so advantageously located;

hence at the start sales were not as brisk or as easy to negotiate as the year before. As the weeks went by, however, they increased until both Brent and Blair exceeded their previous highest record. Ethel Blair's earnings, too, were not inconsiderable, though, because of the constant need for money, she was unable to make any deals on her own account. Predictions as to the growth of Detroit had been well founded. The industries of the city were running night shifts. The country had awakened to the fact that the automobile was a necessity and not a luxury, and Detroit was supplying the cars.

The Wood Motor Company put on so many more men that the lots of the subdivision on which Brent had made his entry into the business advanced sharply in value. This had a reflex influence on Collins's other property, for investors, having acquired confidence, put their profits and savings into other lots.

But, work as hard as they would, the Blairs and Brent could never get ahead of the demands for more and more money. Some who had invested with them, and had made deposits, demanded the return of their investments, and payments were constantly falling due. Always in the background, as their principal worry, were the notes at the bank—a worry which became tangible and menacing when Blair was informed that the paper would not be renewed. This meant that the title to the property would pass into the hands of the bank, and all that Blair, Blair, Mason & Brent would have to show for their savings, thought, and labor would be debts and the bitter lesson of experience.

Despite the dreariness of the outlook, Brent and Blair greeted each other with a smile when they met. Brent did not have much opportunity to visit the Blair home, though he felt the need of association with Betty Mason. He remained away, busy in trying to earn extra commissions, until at length she sent for him and suggested that they should drive out into the country. She looked tired and worn, as if the heat and the tediousness of trying to teach haughty dowagers and flippant debs had affected her physically, although her spirit seemed as buoyant as ever.

They talked but little as they sped along the city's thoroughfares. When they had left the turmoil behind, and he turned off on a country road, she lapsed into total silence. On the crest of a hill, where they had a view of the lights of Detroit, he brought the car to a stop.

"What is it, Betty?" he asked.

"Phil, is it true that we have to pay that money to the bank within thirty days?"

"Yes," he answered grimly. "It's true."

"What do you think of Paul Wilde?"

The sudden switch of the subject matter of the conversation momentarily kept him from returning a reply.

"Why—why—I've never met him," he stammered at last.

"I wanted you to, but he—well, he didn't seem to care to meet you. He always had some excuse. You do know about him—Hal said you asked."

"So far as I can find out, he's a fine, dependable chap; but I can't give you any details."

At that moment he thought he had the key.

"Phil," she said, her voice almost a whisper, "he'll pay what we owe, if I—"

"Tell him to go to hell!" he blazed, grasping her arm so hard, though he did not know what strength he was exerting, that she carried the mark for many days.

"Phil, Phil!" she exclaimed, still in that low voice, in which there was a new note of gladness. "I hoped you would say that!"

With the words, her arms went about his neck and her face was pressed against his.

Brent was paralyzed—paralyzed completely. She had mistaken him utterly, and his position was entirely false. His expression had been the outcome of two quick mental impressions. The first was that Paul Wilde was unwarrantedly interfering in the affairs of Blair, Blair, Mason & Brent. The second and stronger was that the proposal made by Wilde was in the nature of an unfair bargain. He was attempting to buy Betty Mason, and she was not mere merchandise, the title to which could be transferred by the advancement of money. If she wanted to be the wife of Paul Wilde, well and good; but there must be no strings to her acceptance. In Philip's swift indignation, his words had been unintentionally strong, and Betty had taken them as an avowal.

It was a trying situation. For her he felt genuine affection—such an affection as he might have felt toward a sister, if he had had one, but not the kind of affection

that makes a man select one woman as his mate. Mingled with it, and a part of this same regard, was a tenderness that made him incapable of inflicting hurt upon her; and she was clinging to him, her heart beating against his!

As gently as possible, while a trembling shook his body, he disengaged himself, endeavoring to formulate words that would undeceive her and yet give her no pain.

"Betty," he began, "I haven't—"

"I don't care!" she returned, again misinterpreting. "We'll keep right on working, Phil. You're so big and strong and fine, and Ethel and Hal are so wonderful and loyal, everything must come out all right. They like you and trust you. Ethel knows—"

Something cold was being rubbed up and down Philip Brent's spine, and he did not hear the conclusion of the sentence.

"They like you and trust you." Trust him, a thief and a liar? "Ethel knows." Before his eyes were mocking ghosts!

Betty Mason was real, and Grace Moore was only a memory.

IX

BETTY and Philip agreed that for the present there should be no announcement of their engagement, and that things should go on exactly as they had in the past; but Paul Wilde did not come to Detroit, and Blair's manner toward Brent underwent such a change that Brent was confident that even if Betty had exchanged no confidences with her sister, Ethel Blair's quick mind had sensed the true state of affairs.

The day when the bank paper would become due drew steadily nearer. To Brent this was a matter of great moment, for, because of his changed relationship with Betty Mason, finances held a new significance. It was bad enough to marry her without giving her a complete heart, but to make her his wife while the stain of a defalcation was still on him was unthinkable. It would not only be a betrayal of Betty Mason, but of Hal and Ethel Blair as well—a depth of villainy so great that mere thought of it was unbearable.

His mental state grew to be such that it was reflected not only in his dull-eyed and haggard appearance, but also in his sales record. Finally, a few days before the last day of grace, James Collins, wearing an air of determination, called Brent into his office and put to him such apt and searching questions that within five minutes he had the full truth of the financial standing of Blair, Blair, Mason & Brent.

"You damned fool!" he exclaimed, when he had finished working the probe.

"Why should you call me that, Mr. Collins?" Brent demanded hotly.

"Because that's just what you are. Do you think I'm suffering with senile dementia? Do you think my brain has hardened like an old man's arteries? Do you think I'm keeping you here just because I like your looks? I repeat it, you're a damned fool!"

"If you brought me in here to call me names, it's time for me to leave."

"Not so fast!" returned Collins, his heavy brows so contracted that his eyes looked small. "I have some more questions to ask you. Do you think I'm broke?"

Brent shook his head.

"You're right, I'm not—not by a couple of millions, anyway. I'm carrying sixty-nine years, and some of them darned heavy ones, but I'm still an old silver fox when it comes to dirt. I know more about that property of yours than either you or Blair. Why didn't you come to me in the first place? I'm busier than the very devil, but now I've got to go down to that damned bank and take the board of directors by the neck and shake sense into 'em. They'll see light, all right! I owe 'em too damned much for them to be blind; but because of your foolishness, I'll lose half a day, Blair'll lose half a day, and you'll lose half a day—all because you didn't have sense enough to apply to Uncle Jim when you got in over your head!"

Holding Brent by the arm, he called his chauffeur, sent for Blair, and telephoned to the bank.

The directors did not demur at the requested extensions. Instead, they deferred to Collins. Friendship with Collins increased dividend rates, for he was a heavy borrower, and his credit was the best. Nor would there be any question as to future extensions — Collins obtained satisfactory assurances as to that point.

"Now, you two babes in the wood, get out on my subdivision and show the rest how to sell!" he ordered gruffly, when they left the bank.

It was a heartening experience—so heartening that Philip Brent took it as an omen for the future and joined the Blairs in a

dinner at a restaurant, their first dissipation since the night when the project had been announced. If only John Dean and Grace Moore would remain in Leesville, and Leesville would not persist in coming to Detroit!

Still, Philip Brent found ever increasing pleasure in the company of Betty Mason. He believed that the same divination that had enabled her to penetrate his moods guided her when it came to the utter absence of the physical contact that is usually inevitable when two persons are drawn strongly one to the other. In no way did she indicate that she deemed a situation wherein a man had not kissed a girl to whom he was engaged any deviation from the normal.

Before long, however, he found himself inventing excuses to be with her, for taking time from his work that he might drive her out from the close confines of the city. When winter came, and there was no demand on his evenings, the Blair home was his nightly objective. On Sundays they skated on the canals of Belle Isle, traveled the hills of Bloomfield on their skis, or sat silent before the open fire in the living room.

It was when the firelight played on the delicate, regular features of the girl beside him that he found in himself a new feeling toward Betty Mason—one that he had not believed possible, but one that was unfolding slowly. Whether it was the same as the one he had experienced for Grace Moore, he could not tell; but his knowledge of its germination afforded him no small pleasure. Should the coming summer be as profitable as the last, no matter what the outcome of the Blair, Blair, Mason & Brent development, he would be in a position to pay Leesville; and, having paid Leesville, he would be wholly Philip Brent.

Many such evenings passed before he reached the point where he resolved that as soon as he was free from that obligation, he would introduce Betty Mason to John Dean and to Grace Moore, and would allow her to decide whether the engagement should continue. That decision brought him not a little relief, for, when the funds were available, there would be but one more point to clear up—how to make restitution without bringing John Dean to life.

The winter was a short one. Almost before he realized it, the warmer days of early March were at hand, though the Belle Isle canals and Lake St. Clair were still ice-covered. It was Betty's suggestion that they should leave the canals and go to Lake St. Clair, up beyond Windmill Point, where there would not be the congestion that existed on the island waterways.

Only a few skaters were on the lake, and almost all of them left when the wind, switching to the north, chilled the air bitingly; but Philip Brent and Betty Mason, warmed and exhilarated by the swift motion, remained, going farther and farther from the shore until, when twilight descended and they turned back, they were beyond the ship channel.

There was no warning of what was to happen — not an indication that the sun had wrought that particular spot into such rottenness that it would give under their weight and plunge them both into the icy water.

The sudden grip of the cold paralyzed not only Brent's body but his perceptive faculties as well. His body was hard, and he recovered almost instantaneously. When he looked about for his companion, however, she had disappeared.

A horrible fear swept him. Not only was the channel deep, but he knew that the work of the sun must have been assisted by a current. His swift thought was that she would be carried under the ice field, and that her small form would remain in the keeping of the lake until after the spring break-up.

There was but one thing to do. Taking the risk of being drawn under the ice sheet, Brent dived into the cold depths.

He found Betty only a short distance below the surface, her eyes closed, her body inert. With her in his grasp, he came to the top and began to fight his way toward solid ice.

It was a bitter battle. He was handicapped not only by the rotten ice that clogged his efforts, and by the burden that made it possible to use but one arm, but also by that which was worse—the freezing fingers that seemed to be clutching at his heart.

When he reached the rim of the floe, it crumbled in his fingers, until, the breath almost gone from him, he felt convinced that they would perish together. With a final effort, however, he hoisted his insensible burden to the smooth surface. Then, utterly spent, Brent slipped back and sank.

It was fate. The death that he had simulated had claimed him at last. A grim jest, indeed, but one well worked out! Such were his thoughts as the water closed over him.

But another thought entered. This time a complication existed which had not been present when the Redwing capsized. If he drowned, Betty Mason would freeze to death. That was the reason why he found that he had not tapped his final reserve of strength.

Again he was at the edge of the ice, and this time it held while he painfully drew himself upward and lay on its very brink, pantingly awaiting strength for an attempt to arise. Then, surprised at accomplishing the feat, he raised Betty, and, half carrying, half dragging her, stumbled toward the shore and safety.

It was a tortuous, crazy journey, which was no more than begun when from the sky came a whirl of fine snow that obliterated the few lights visible and took from him all sense of direction. When he realized that he was lost, and that, instead of traveling toward safety, he might be heading out toward the center of the lake, he tried to shout. Only a rasping sound came from his throat; and he had need of all breath available.

Slipping, every movement a mighty effort—for his clothing had frozen—yet progressing, his mind steadily growing more numb, he kept up the fight until somehow, in the darkness, he ran against an obstruction of wood. With numb fingers he explored the surface, coming in contact with a window, and then with a door—a fisherman's shanty!

So useless were his hands that it was almost impossible to operate the latch; but at last he succeeded. With his limp load, he fell into the little shelter, which seemed wonderfully warm and snug after the gale. In the stove were coals, and, with breath somewhat restored, he tossed in more wood. Then, loosening the girl's clothing, he chafed her wrists and ankles.

There was no response. Resignedly he accepted the fact that she had perished—only to reject it and to make a frantic search. Away down in one corner he found what he desired, and was thankful that some men took stimulants. Only a few drops remained in the bottle, but he forced them between her blue lips, and her eyelids flickered.

Her rapid recovery was surprising. One moment she was lying there apparently lifeless; the next, she had raised herself partially and was faintly uttering his name.

The sudden removal of the strain overcame Philip Brent, and he dropped to his knees beside her. The return of her life was a gift of God.

He kissed Betty full on the lips.

X

THERE is a popular belief that a man who runs away after committing a crime is constantly weighted down by the fear of detection, the conviction that some one is bound to recognize him. This haunting terror, it has often been said, causes such a mental state that he is pursued even in his dreams.

Until he saw Rodman Price crossing Woodward Avenue at Fort Street, Philip Brent had never experienced such an apprehension. Perhaps there was something unusual in his psychology, or perhaps it was due to the dispatch from Leesville that he had read on his first day in Detroit; but certain it is that while his thoughts had often been of Leesville, he had never pictured to himself the possibility of encountering some one from that little town in Detroit—least of all on the crowded main thoroughfare of the city.

Brent had been in the office of James Collins, and was on his way to the latest Collins subdivision—a development of such magnitude that it had been advertised nationally, for by this time Detroit had become known as one of the wonder cities of the country.

That this advertising would have a reaction in Leesville had not occurred to Philip Brent, engrossed as he was in the small world of his own creating. Consequently, the sight of a man who was of the past so upset him that had he not been stopped at the moment by the turning of the traffic signal, he might have lost control of his car.

In the van of the other motors, close up to the white line that marked the lane for pedestrians, he had to sit and watch Price make his way across the street. There could be no mistake. It was surely Rod Price—the quick movements, the erect carriage, the black hair, and the stubby brown mustache. If he glanced to the left—

Waiting tensely for the turn of the head which he was sure was inevitable, a thou-

sand memories poured over Philip Brent, and with them a crushing fear. Recognition would bring crashing down the structure that he had erected with such care. The wreck would be the more complete because of the deception he had practiced—a fraud which would make it absolutely impossible to rehabilitate himself in the eyes of Leesville, for it would give to his breach of trust the appearance of long and deliberate premeditation.

He tried to outline the course of action he would take should the eyes of Rod Price meet his own; for Price would surely see him, not as Philip Brent, but as John Dean—and Price was one of those whose securities had been in John Dean's vault!

But Price passed on, without looking either to the right or the left. Evidently his mind was so entirely occupied by other matters that there was no crevice for a telepathic suggestion that less than ten feet away from him was a friend whom he had mourned as the victim of a tragedy, but whom he probably regarded as one who had betrayed him for a few hundred dollars.

With the changing of the signal, so great was the relief from the strain of that tortured sixty seconds, Philip Brent shot his car ahead, his great urge being to put as much distance between himself and Rod Price as possible. All the way out to the property he took chances with the speed laws; and when he finally reached it, so distraught was he that he was inefficient and bungling.

That night he broke an engagement with Betty Mason. He wanted an opportunity to think, to con over the situation, to take new precautions, if that was possible; for the fear of detection was upon him so strongly that he thought he saw Leesville faces everywhere.

If he had encountered Tom Lockhart or Bob Coutard, he would not have been agitated so greatly. Their business occasionally took them out of Leesville, while Paul Lachlin — Brent had overlooked this fact while contemplating his escape from Leesville—was continually prowling about the country, seeking oil leases; but Rod Price's bond business was in and about Leesville, and he seldom left the town except to go to the New York headquarters.

Price's presence meant that Detroit had gone to Leesville, that the small town's ignorance concerning the Western metropolis had been dissipated, and that Detroit's importance had been recognized by the entire country. That must be the solution, Brent reasoned; for, otherwise, staid, conservative, tradition-bound Leesville would have had no communication with a city so far away, save possibly that of the daily press.

His first thought, naturally, was flight. To escape from Detroit would be far easier than his escape from Leesville had been. He had but to go to the Union Station and take a train for wherever he desired, with but a small chance of being seen by any one who had known him as John Dean. However, comb his mind as he would, he could think of no other place where he could find sanctuary. His financial condition was a factor, for he had practically no ready money, and it took money to travel. Then, too, he had run away once, and had since accomplished virtually nothing. If he continued to flit about, in time he would sink to vagabondage.

Coupled strongly with his lack of disposition to become a nomad were his associations in Detroit, and, not the least, his relation to Betty Mason. To desert the Blairs at that moment would be base treachery, for only by pooling all their earnings were they able to hold on and wait for the pending settlement — which could not be very long delayed, as the case was set for the May term of the recorder's court, and must be decided within a few months. Still worse, to desert Betty Mason would be double treachery.

The City Hall clock struck four times. In the tones pouring from the dingy tower Brent seemed to find an answer to the problem. The voice of Detroit had spoken, had ordered him to stay. The chances of discovery existed, but they were not so great as they would have been had not the number of human units been steadily increasing by thousands since his advent, so that his screen was becoming more and more opaque. No matter where he might go, the possibility of having his mask torn away could not be averted.

It was on that very morning that the Blairs, Betty Mason, and Philip Brent were lifted from the slough into which they had been cast. Just as no warning of disaster had been given, so there was no foreknowledge that the injunction that had paralyzed their activities would be dissolved.

The city council had made a change in its plan. Instead of a few large playgrounds, it had decided that the children

would receive more benefit if the recreation centers were smaller in size, greater in number, and more scattered. Accordingly, another tract was selected in the vicinity of the Blair, Blair, Mason & Brent development, the injunction was lifted, and the owners were free to do as they would with their real estate.

The manner in which the two women received the news disturbed Brent not a little. Blair and he had slapped each other on the back, had lighted cigarettes, only to throw them away and light others, and had called each other unlovely names. Blair had even danced a few steps; but Ethel Blair clasped Betty Mason to her, and the tears of the two mingled.

Brent looked at them blankly. Then his arm stole around little Betty Mason, and he tried to explain that instead of weeping, she should be smiling. Much was his confusion when the tinkle of Mrs. Blair's mirth was heard.

Blair shook hands with him again, squeezing his fingers until they ached, and Ethel Blair kissed him. Thus was made the announcement of the engagement of Philip Brent and Betty Mason.

The delay had lasted a whole year, and now a surge of haste attacked them. Immediately the company of Blair, Blair, Mason & Brent began to gather up the threads, and within forty-eight hours the clatter of hammers and the snarl of saws broke the silence that had brooded for months.

Then they made a discovery—one that had been apparent in a measure to Ethel Blair, but not to the others. Instead of working them an injury by delaying them, the city had in reality done them the greatest favor possible.

Within that year, Detroit's hunger for small houses had grown until it was at the point of famine. Wage earners had to have shelter for their families. That shelter was not available, Detroit not having reached the apartment stage; and Blair, Blair, Mason & Brent were building small houses.

Buyers fairly tumbled over one another to make their deposits and to obtain contracts. Those of little faith, who had threatened suit when their payments were not returned at once, now threatened legal action if they were not reinstated. It was Brent, slipping back now and then into the character of John Dean, who handled those clients, and who, by showing them the untenability of their claims, obtained from them bonuses for preference.

In the excitement, in the thrill of accomplishment, and in the knowledge that their profits would be more than double what they would have been the year before, Philip Brent did not take thought of the fact that he was a fugitive, and that in bringing buyers to the development he might attract some from Leesville. Even the encounter with Rod Price lost most of its disturbing features, and, in the passing days, became so blurred as to seem more like a nightmare than an actual happening.

By winter the company's task was completed. The last payment was received and made, the last house was turned over to the last buyer, and the builders were paid off and dismissed. The project was a splendid success, and Philip Brent, when he computed the cash in hand, found that not only would he be able to discharge his Leesville obligation, but, with that accomplished, he would be practically independent.

The knowledge did not bring him the peace he had pictured, however. Instead of being at ease, he was disquieted—though, when he had repaid his old debt, his marriage to Betty Mason would follow, and he would continue in partnership with his associates. New plans were already being discussed by Hal and Ethel Blair; and Betty Mason was making purchases and spending her evenings in sewing.

Before him were two problems—how to pay his debt and allow John Dean to remain dead, and how to tell Betty Mason the truth.

No excuse for delay remained. He had to face the situation squarely and act at once.

Taking out his car in the early evening, he started for the Blair home. On the way, however, something caused him to change his mind, and he turned at the Mount Clemens road and continued on out into the country. His thoughts chaotic, he pressed his foot harder and harder on the accelerator until he was running even with a speeding express interurban car, which was so close to the highway that he could have touched it by reaching out.

Suddenly a small boy on a bicycle wabbled into view. Brent sounded his horn. The din seemed to confuse the lad, for he veered into the path of the automobile.

Philip Brent turned his car off the road. There was a crash, and for the fraction of

a second he felt himself being carried along by the interurban. Then the cement roadway came up with terrific force and suddenness, and he lost consciousness.

XI

BRENT escaped being drawn under the wheels of the trolley car; but when he reached the hospital, the surgeons who made an examination refused to hazard an opinion as to whether he would live. He had struck the cement paving on his face; his skull was slightly fractured, his nose was a pulpy mass of flesh and bone, and there were symptoms of internal injuries as well.

For twenty-four hours he hung between life and death, his identity unknown. Then came a change for the better; but it was of slight duration, for, shortly after he had regained consciousness long enough to give his name and address, unmistakable symptoms of tetanus developed — paroxysms and a locking of the jaws making his case one of the mysteries of the hospital.

The season of the year caused a delay in obtaining antitetanus serum, and, when it finally did arrive, the staff thought that it had come too late. The customary doses were administered, however, but the patient showed no improvement. A consultation followed, and the number of units was increased. The larger doses seemed to bring about slight relief, and after another conference the units were increased to thousands. From that time, though with extreme slowness, Philip Brent improved.

And then another complication developed —the injured nose. Satisfied that it could not be saved, an operation was performed and the task of rebuilding was begun—this, of course, necessitating additional weeks of hospitalization.

To Brent, the experience was in no way real. Instead, it was a mixture of torment and peace, with the curious phenomenon of being two distinct persons, one of whom lay pain-racked on a bed, while the other floated away and visited strange worlds—worlds in which not an outline, whether of landscape or of humanity, was sharply drawn. The transitions from one to the other were so rapid that he could not keep track of them. He seemed to shuttle from Philip Brent—or John Dean, for he was never sure which—to that other being who pitied Philip Brent because of Philip's agony.

Furthermore, there seemed to be no differentiation between day and night, no light and shadow, no measuring of time, no boundaries, no landmarks — just a white world, peopled with white figures, and then another world, twisted, warped, shimmering, unsteady, inhabited by creatures with features awry.

When he was no longer soothed by opiates, and his brain had cleared, he recognized that all this was hallucination. He wondered how many revelations he had made, how much of that which belonged to his hidden life he had exposed. His temperature increased with the thought, until reason told him that in anæsthesia there is no line of demarcation between truth and fancy, and that no matter what he had muttered or screamed, it was of no concern.

" How long have I been here?" he asked, when he recognized a surgeon.

" Six weeks," was the reply.

Six weeks! He had thought that a day had passed, at the most. It was incomprehensible. His body was still bandaged. He could feel plaster on his face, and two sticks protruded from his nose.

" How long will I have to stay?"

" Can't say exactly—possibly a month. You'll have a slight scar on either side of your nose, but otherwise you won't be disfigured. Even that won't be noticeable after awhile. I'm going to take the dressing off, and you'll look more like a human being. Is there any one you wish to see after I get through with you?"

Betty Mason came into his mind.

" There's a Miss Mason downstairs," replied Dr. Hermitage—Brent had asked his name. " She comes almost every day."

Brent noticed the flowers on the table. It was the first time that his brain had registered detail.

" Keep as quiet as possible, and give nature a chance," continued Hermitage, as he worked. " When you came in, we didn't think there would be much salvage, but you seem to be built of iron. Still, even iron succumbs to oxidization, so don't burn up any of your strength by unnecessary exertion. That means that Miss Mason may remain ten minutes and no longer, and that you, Mr. Brent, must do as little talking as you can. Avoid all excitement. I'll send her up right away."

Brent heard Betty's footsteps in the corridor. Then he saw her stop at his open door, look in, and pass on.

"Betty!" he called, his disappointment great.

She turned and again peered into the room, with uncertainty in her eyes.

"Why, Betty, don't you know me?" he demanded.

"You've changed so," she replied.

"Oh, I'll be myself soon—only a slight scar, the doctor said."

"Yes, but your—"

Her sentence was broken by a flood of tears. Her hands went out to his, and she moved closer to him.

"My what?" he asked, stirred by the manifestation of sympathy, but wondering why she should be so much agitated.

"Haven't you seen yourself? Haven't you looked in a mirror?" she sobbed.

"No. The orderly has been shaving me—I'm too jerky; and they just took the bandage off my face a moment or so before you came in."

She made another effort to speak, but, turning her head quickly, left the room. He could not understand, but something disquieted him. His quick flash of joy at seeing Betty after so long an interval changed to uneasiness.

When she returned, she brought a mirror with her. With much interest Brent picked it up, and what he saw startled him.

The first thing he noticed was his nose. It was no longer a Dean nose, his most characteristic feature. In remaking it the surgeons had shortened it and changed its contour. Then there was his hair. No longer was it a light brown, but actually a chestnut red. It was the nose, however, that held his attention.

"No wonder they said there would be a slight scar!" he gasped.

"Your voice isn't the same, either," said Betty. "Phil, you give me the sensation of being with some one else — a strange man!"

He could not answer intelligently, for what he had learned had stupefied him. He was wondering if he was really sane, or if the hallucinations were still in his brain. Before he could gather his faculties, Dr. Hermitage had returned and was leading Betty away. The ten minutes had expired.

As soon as she had left, his wits returned, and he questioned Hermitage. The surgeon said the change that had come over Brent had been a puzzle to the staff. With one exception, there was no medical record of such a thing. Dr. Howe, he said, had had a case wherein antitetanus serum, given in large doses, had caused the color of the patient's hair to alter slightly; and on this testimony they ascribed what had happened to Brent to the tremendous doses he had taken.

"But she told me that my voice was different, too," said Brent.

"The lowering of timbre might very well be due to the same thing," replied Hermitage. "Brent, you're mighty fine clinical material!"

But Brent was paying little attention. He was thinking of the future. Betty had left the mirror behind. He raised it and looked at himself long and earnestly, as realization came to him of the meaning of what he saw.

"After all these months," he said to himself, as Dr. Hermitage went out of the room, "John Dean is really dead—unless I wake up and find that I've been having an ether dream!"

Like a flash there came a solution of the problem that had been besetting him from the outset, a revelation of the way in which he could discharge his obligation to Leesville. There was no longer anything to keep him from going back, for even Betty Mason did not know him. With his new physical being he could return to Leesville and purchase, at a price that would more than recompense those he had wronged, the stock that had made him a thief!

With this knowledge there came an alien lightness. So great was his relief that he probed himself for the cause. The enlightenment did not reach him suddenly, but gradually.

During all his stay in Detroit he had thought of Leesville. He had not been able to dismiss the little town from his mind. The reason was simple enough—nostalgia! Yes, homesickness was the cause, for the mere thought of going back set in motion new vibrations that gave him a buoyancy almost equal to that of the morphine that had eased his pain.

He looked into the mirror again, this time half fearfully, for he had had so many dreams that he could not be certain which was reality. The face he saw was not the face of John Dean, though its general outline was undoubtedly the same. No one looking at him, even though staring earnestly, could connect him with John Dean. His emancipation was complete. He could go back!

He would look again on old scenes, and talk with those with whom he had grown up. Yes, and he would see Grace Moore—though he would make no effort to do so, for Grace Moore now meant nothing to him. He was grateful to her, however. Had it not been for her, he would still be John Dean, living in Leesville and content with Leesville, while now he was Philip Brent, a Detroit business man, with a modest fortune in his possession and the prospect of a much larger one to come—and not only a material fortune, but more, for there was also Betty Mason!

The future? It beckoned to him with shining fingers. Free from all connection with the past, he could build on a foundation so solid that it would endure. Let Rod Price, Bob Coutard, and all the rest come to Detroit! He would meet them even on the streets of Leesville, and give them glance for glance without a fear in his heart!

He half raised himself. A nurse gently pushed him back, and broke his line of thought by thrusting a thermometer into his mouth. Then Dr. Hermitage came in, and chided the patient for allowing his temperature to rise.

But his heat was not that of fever—it was due to his eagerness to clear away the remaining obstacles and begin his new life. Still, he had sense enough to realize that attainment of his objective would only be delayed by attempting to hasten time; so he took himself in hand, and relaxed.

Much to his surprise, his next visitor was James Collins. The veteran dealer came in unannounced. His white silk vest was as immaculate as ever, though in his arms was a mixed burden of fruit and flowers. His surprise at seeing the change that had been wrought in Brent was so great that he relaxed his grip, and oranges rolled over the floor.

"Good God, Brent!" he exclaimed, stooping and retrieving the fruit. "I thought I was in the wrong room. You're a changed man!"

"Outwardly, at any rate."

"Glad to see you looking so well, even if so different. You've turned red-headed, I see. That doesn't make so much difference, though. Stay in the real estate game in Detroit a few years, and you'll get gray—we all do. Your voice isn't the same, either; but your nose! That's the real difference. Don't want to get too personal, but I can't say I like the job Hermitage did, though he's as proud of it as the father of a first son. I liked your old nose best."

"Why?" asked Brent, much interested.

"Man I used to room with in college had a nose just like yours. He came from down East somewhere—I was born in Hackensack, New Jersey—but I can't remember his home town. Name was John Dean. Never smiled. We used to call him Sour Dean. The resemblance sort of drew me to you, and made me take an interest in you, because the sight of you made me feel young, and I'm hustling seventy now."

Not noticing that he was not holding his hearer's attention, Collins talked on, and finally asked Brent his plans.

"Haven't any just at present." Brent's utterance was uneven. "Thought, when I got up, I'd take a little trip East and rest."

"Good idea! I'll give you some letters. Stand-off crowd down East, but letters might help you some, because old Jim Collins is getting to be rather well known about the country. Ought to, the way the advertising agencies collect! But we're going in heavier than ever this year. The local outlook isn't any too bright—there's a little reaction setting in—but we're going to pound harder nationally. If you don't keep on for yourself, you're welcome back in the organization. Always got a place for a good man."

Collins arose so briskly that he seemed to have misstated his age.

"Hermitage will wring my neck. He's sore at me anyway, because I'm a better bridge player than he is. Said I could stay only five minutes, and I've been here seven. I'll have those letters sent up. Good-by and good luck!"

When he had gone, Brent experienced a relaxation from strain. "Sour Dean," his grandfather, a college roommate of James Collins! Leesville, always Leesville—he could not escape it! He wondered how he had retained his composure, how he had returned an intelligent answer to Collins's question.

The Blairs came with Betty on her next visit. They hadn't any business plans for the immediate future, Blair said, and he repeated Collins's statement that a slump in real estate seemed imminent. There would be plenty of time to think of business when Brent was on his feet.

"What are you going to do when you get out of this prison?" asked Blair.

"I have a few matters in New York that I want to attend to," answered Brent, pleased to get the opening that he had been seeking.

Blair looked at his sister-in-law quickly.

"We thought we would go to Chicago for a visit," he said; "but Betty—"

"If Phil is going East, she hasn't any excuse for staying here," interrupted Ethel Blair.

But it was not until weeks had elapsed that Brent was assisted down the stairway of the hospital and into a taxicab. He was not strong enough to travel, and the scar on his nose was still visible; so he delayed, on one pretext and another, until winter grew old. Nor would he give a definite answer to Blair's insistence that they should form another corporation.

"Not while I'm still a wreck," he said. "Don't hold up your Chicago trip any longer on my account. If you do, it will be too late to do anything when the season opens."

"That doesn't make any difference. With things as they are, Ethel and I have just about decided to take the summer off, rent a bungalow somewhere on Lake Michigan, and have a real rest."

In April, feeling himself again, and with the scar visible only after the closest inspection, Brent was ready. When the Blairs and Betty Mason boarded a westbound train, he took one for New York—but his destination was Leesville.

XII

THE Leesville to which Philip Brent came was not the Leesville that John Dean had left. That fact was apparent before the train began to slow down.

A scant three years before, when Philip Brent had been John Dean, the construction of a new building was such news that the *Bulletin* took notice of it to the extent of an editorial pointing out the progress the city was making. Now Brent noted from the car window more than a dozen structures that had not been in existence when he had seen Leesville for the last time; and many others were in progress of erection. His home town had taken on the appearance of the development back in Detroit that had enabled him to return to pay off his debt.

Another change struck him, as he bought a copy of the *Bulletin* at the station. Instead of the staid and conservative headlines so much in keeping with Leesville as Brent knew it, and so typical of James Reagan, the veteran editor, the type was large and the style of writing, in contrast, almost flippant.

Brent turned to the editorial page. Yes, Reagan was gone, and in his place was Tyler Bliss—a name unfamiliar to Brent.

Puzzled and with much disappointment—his sensations being those of a stranger rather than a home-comer—Brent continued his walk along Main Street. It was a thoroughfare more urban and busier than he had deemed possible, and in the crowd upon its sidewalks he recognized but few familiar faces. In the old days the sight of a stranger would have excited curiosity and caused the craning of necks, but no one took any notice of Philip Brent.

As he neared his old office, he noted that the sign of an attorney at law was still over the stairway, and he raised his eyes to read the gold lettering on the windows, that he might know who had succeeded him. The name was not that of a stranger. The suite that had been occupied by Deans ever since the building was made habitable—the date on the corner stone was 1870—had become the headquarters of William Traverse.

For an instant, Brent felt a flash of resentment. Not content with taking Grace Moore from him, this upstart newcomer had had the effrontery to invade the very sanctuary of the Dean family!

But the feeling vanished practically with its coming. John Dean was Philip Brent, and Philip Brent had no family. Still, he quickened his steps until he reached the hotel.

Just how his presence came to be nosed about he did not ascertain, though he ascribed it to the questions he had asked. In his quest for information he had been obliged to make some revelations concerning himself, and had mentioned the fact that he had been a member of the organization of James Collins, whose name was not unknown in Leesville. This showed that the metamorphosis of the city had not been as complete as he had supposed, for the old curiosity still existed to a certain extent.

While Brent spread knowledge of himself, he also learned the causes of the change that he saw in Leesville. The old town was in the midst of a boom, the first of its more than a century and a half of history. On the site of the mill built by Sherman

Lee when he laid out his town, a new factory had been constructed, and this had been so successful from the start that lately it had been doubled in size. New blood had been drawn into the city, traditions had been discarded, and William Traverse had been elected mayor.

Brent did not get the full details until Tyler Bliss called on him that evening. The editor, an alert-looking young man who exhibited signs of the training he had received in New York, explained that he had come personally, instead of sending a reporter, because he desired to welcome to Leesville a member of the organization of James Collins.

"While Leesville, of course, can't compare with Detroit, you've picked a live one," said Bliss, resting his cane, with its heavy handle of silver, against his chair. "This old town is just beginning to rub its eyes after nodding for years. We intend to make a metropolis out of it!"

"It seems rather strange to me," said Brent, speaking guardedly, for about Bliss there was a questioning air. "I understand that up until only about a year ago Leesville was a quiet old place, content with its own ways, and impervious to progress. What caused the change?"

"Rather a curious story—one that begins with a tragedy. A young lawyer named Dean—his family went back to the very genesis of Leesville—was accidentally drowned in Sand Lake about three years ago. His body was never recovered, but there was nothing unusual about that, as I understand that bodies are rarely found in that lake. It's too deep and cold. Well, when Dean's estate was settled, it was found that he had exchanged certain securities, left with him by clients, for stock in a lamp corporation. The company met with some difficulties"—Brent tensed—"at the start, owing to charges of patent infringement; but while things looked bad at first, the trouble was brushed away. Then the stock became more valuable than ever, for the company controlled a process which not only cheapened manufacture but provided a more durable filament. The stock, of course, was turned over to Dean's clients. Traverse offered to look after their interests, and he brought the factory here—that's why he's mayor, because it remade Leesville. That's the story, Mr. Brent. Too bad young Dean couldn't have lived to benefit by his keenness of vision!"

When Bliss left, Brent's feelings were in a turmoil. Uppermost was a sense of futility, of utter failure. He was glad that his ill advised act had turned out as it did, yet he also suffered a keen disappointment. The power to make restitution had been taken from him, and nothing was left for him to do. It would be better to fade away quietly, as he had done once before, return to Detroit, and forget—and it would be easier to forget, because Leesville, like himself, had taken on a new identity.

But he was not to leave, for within twenty-four hours he became a figure of such importance to Leesville that his plans were taken from his hands. The story that Bliss wrote for the *Bulletin* was the basis, it being intimated that the presence of Brent in Leesville meant that James Collins had turned his eyes toward the city, and that his lieutenant was an emissary of further and greater prosperity.

Leesville, awakened from its old inertia, took possession of Philip Brent. It placed a car at his disposal. It insisted that he should move to the country club at Sand Lake as soon as he could arrange it, and that he should meet the mayor at once. So constantly was he surrounded by committees and callers that had he gone to the station, he would have been accompanied by a retinue.

As he faced William Traverse, Brent kept himself in hand by sheer force of will. Traverse had not changed greatly. He had grown a trifle heavier, and seemed surer of himself, as if entirely oriented. Nor was his old force diminished. He greeted Brent cordially, and talked with him intelligently on conditions in Detroit, now and then inserting a skillful question into the conversation. His eyes looked squarely into Brent's, and on Brent was a sensation that William Traverse was seeing John Dean.

In that situation Philip Brent's sense of humor again manifested itself, especially when Traverse urged that the man from Detroit should take dinner with him at the club that night, and meet his wife. Brent wanted to laugh and refuse, but there was no refusing William Traverse; so that afternoon he moved out to the club.

It was with strange feelings that he looked at Sand Lake, the body of water which, so far as Leesville knew, held the remains of John Dean. The lake had not changed in the slightest. It still rippled clear and cold, and the trees were thrusting

out their foliage, just as he had seen them assume new life many springs.

Before going down to dinner he wrote a long letter to Betty Mason. This gave him strength which he needed, for, though he believed that he could even meet Grace Moore without betraying himself, still he experienced slight tremors at the thought. At the same time he was eager to see her again, to prove whether she was the same as she had been or had changed as the city had changed.

The trembling had not left him when he sighted the flaming head of William Traverse among a group in the lounge, and it seemed as if Traverse's words—" This way, Mr. Brent "—came from a great distance. As they walked across the floor, Brent felt his gait stiff and unnatural, but he could not alter it. He was at a crisis, for, if any one should recognize him, it would be Grace Moore.

Traverse stopped, and Philip Brent resolutely raised his eyes—only to drop them quickly.

Instead of meeting the cool, level glance of Grace Moore, he saw Nellie Deering.

XIII

PHILIP BRENT was in the company of Grace Moore that same evening, as he had had a prescience that he would be. Just as the dinner ended—it had seemed interminable to him—she came through the door with her brother. He could not keep his eyes from her. As if held by magnetism, he watched her as the doctor took her coat to the check room and she stood an instant before the mirror, pushing back her hair with a characteristic gesture. He could not remove his gaze even when she turned, and recognizing Traverse, smiled at him in a friendly manner.

Leesville had changed, but Grace Moore was the same. Just as in the old days, she was poised, evidently capable, yet graceful. With this realization, the years and all that had happened in them were dissipated like a morning mist, and Philip Brent found himself rising with the cry " Grace!" on his lips.

He silenced the call, but he could not hide the action, though he escaped embarrassment, for Traverse had risen at that same instant, and Grace Moore was approaching the table.

Brent's response to the introduction was stiff and awkward. His emotions were seething and churning so violently that the room seemed to grow larger and larger until it lost all dimension. He wasn't thinking, however, of the strangeness of the situation, in which the man who, as he had believed, had stolen her affections was the one who was introducing him to her. A wholly new realization had suddenly come to him. That which he had thought dead still lived. Instead of growing cold, it had merely smoldered, and the sight of her had caused it to burst into flame.

So far as outward appearances indicated, no sign of that which was agitating him was communicated to Grace Moore. She seemed as if she were merely meeting a stranger, one who did not interest her greatly, but whose presence politeness required her to recognize. Enough of this calm was communicated to Philip Brent to enable him to regain his self-control, though the chair that Traverse placed for her was so close beside him that his clothing all but brushed hers.

Nevertheless, he was not entirely at ease. He feared that by some mannerism, by some revealing gesture, he would expose himself to her; for they had been closely associated in the old days, and she had had years in which to study him. However, she conversed of trivial things—of a match for a dollar a hole between Paul Lachlin and Rod Price, which had cost Price several dollars that afternoon. She mentioned names and things that had once been of importance to Philip Brent, but now were meaningless.

At length her brother came and took her away; but when Brent was alone at last—in a room which looked out over the lake, with its little waves dancing in the moonlight—he had to endure further trial. The discovery that he had made had brought its attendant complication. Grace Moore was free, though why he did not know, but he was not. Betty Mason!

Betty reposed the utmost confidence in him, as did the Blairs. Such was their trust in him that they had not pried into his past, but had accepted him at a valuation which they had placed upon him themselves. Because of that trust, he was not his own master. Never again would he betray a trust! The cure had been complete.

The only way in which he could retain the few shreds of self-respect still remaining would be to get away from Leesville as soon as possible, return to Detroit, and

make a full and complete confession. That would only be justice to Betty Mason and to Hal and Ethel Blair. It might strip his life clean of that which he had come to hold very dear indeed, but, seeing himself as he did, he could conceive of no other course.

Yet he temporized, and, in delaying, lost. He did not admit his defeat at once. Instead, he postponed his departure from day to day, on the ground that possibly openings in Leesville would be better than in Detroit for Blair, Blair, Mason & Brent, and that in justice to his associates he should make sure of the situation by ascertaining values absolutely before he informed them of his discoveries. Furthermore, Betty was in Chicago, and there was no need for him to hurry back.

In his heart he knew that this was merely an evasion, that he was really kept there by the presence of Grace Moore, and that, having found that she was not the wife of another, he could not again give her up.

In the ensuing days, through no design, they were together often, meeting unexpectedly, chatting on the porch of the club, or encountering each other at the informal functions at which he was a guest. It seemed entirely natural that he should be in her company—a throwback to the days of John Dean.

Still, there was a difference. About her was a reserve which John Dean had never noticed, a reserve which, even after Brent's stay had been protracted to a month, retained limits that he could not pass. After careful thought he ascribed this to the fact that Philip Brent was a stranger, and not a playmate of her girlhood.

In him, furthermore, was a curiosity which she never satisfied. Only once did he succumb to the temptation to plumb the depths of her mind, in hope of finding an answer to his questions. To do so, he didn't need to resort to pretext, as the name of John Dean had often been mentioned. John Dean, dead, was a person to whom Leesville, both the old and the new, gave its respect.

As casually as he could, Brent alluded to the tragedy. Grace turned her head so quickly that he could not observe her expression. When she faced him again, no agitation was perceptible in her face or in her voice; but she switched the conversation into another channel.

So Philip Brent lingered, buying a little property as an excuse for his presence, and feeling more and more like a traitor. In his letters to Betty Mason he was noncommittal, making no revelation as to the true state of affairs. When she did not reply for some time, he began to wonder as to the cause.

Then came a letter written very kindly, and with obvious intent to cause as little pain as possible, but conclusive, nevertheless. The change in Betty's feelings, she said, had begun when she saw his altered appearance, and had been shaped definitely by her visit to Chicago—she was still there—and now she was certain. She went on:

> This letter would be harder to write, Phil, if it wasn't for one thing. That is the fact that I really proposed to you. Of course you would deny it, but it's true, just the same. But though I've decided that Paul is the man for me, you will always have a true, firm friend in—
>
> BETTY MASON.

XIV

THOUGH Betty Mason's letter gave him his freedom, and he was under no further obligation either to her or to the Blairs, Philip Brent was not entirely rid of complications. Between Grace Moore and himself there was a barrier, and that barrier was Philip Brent.

The experiences through which he had passed, the knowledge of life that he had gained, and his discovery of himself, made him see things so clearly that he perceived his deception in all its enormity. Through a stroke of fortune, he was a benefactor of his old clients, and not a thief; but he was still Philip Brent. Until he disposed of Brent and revived John Dean, he could not approach Grace Moore with the question that burned within him.

Considered in the abstract, it was a simple matter. He had only to proclaim the fact that John Dean's body was not in Sand Lake; that instead of perishing in the storm, Dean had swam to the shore, changed clothing, and furtively escaped to Detroit, where he became Philip Brent. He could give reasons for such an act—the lawsuit which made it appear that his judgment had been wrong, that he had been ruined, and had involved his friends. The new Leesville would not pour on him the contumely of the old; and to Grace Moore he could confide further reasons that lay behind his act, and she would understand.

Even at the outset, however, when the first flush had died down, difficulties appeared. With his altered nose, his deeper

voice, and his reddish hair, no photograph of John Dean would support his claim. Physically, there was no way of identifying the two men. His body bore no distinguishing marks, and he had taken no distinctive possession with him in his new life, for he had never thought to be John Dean again.

He could give definite facts as to his family, and could trace his lineage back to Enos Dean, but this same information was available to any one at the public library. As for intimate facts concerning his family or his own younger days, brief as his present stay in Leesville had been, he had heard incidents revivified which he had forgotten. There was nothing that he could set forward that would be conclusive, even though the jury were composed entirely of older townspeople.

He could not even give Grace conclusive evidence. They had been together much, but their relationship had been such that though they had exchanged occasional confidences, these had been of the most commonplace kind. Rack his mind as he would, he could not reconstruct one single outstanding scene that would convince her that Philip Brent was in reality John Dean.

Easily enough could he prove that his appearance had changed since the accident; but it was Philip Brent, not John Dean, who had come into collision with the street car, who had taken the antitetanus serum, and whose nose had been rebuilt in the hospital.

No, should he make the attempt to rehabilitate himself in his old individuality, only suspicion would be aroused. He would be looked upon as a pretender, an impostor who was seeking to claim that which belonged to a dead man—the honor that John Dean's town was giving him. Even worse, he would probably be charged with being a despicable thief endeavoring to steal the dead man's property—an interest in the factory on which the prosperity of the town was founded.

He considered his premise well taken, for he knew that Leesville, modern though it had become, had not thrown aside its old curiosity. In his possession were letters forwarded to him by James Collins—letters from people in the New Jersey town, inquiring as to Philip Brent's connection with Collins's enterprises.

James Collins! The thought of his name awakened a momentary hope. Collins's visit to the hospital—his dissatisfaction with what the surgeons had done—his mention of his college roommate—his reference to the Dean nose! Collins could swear to all that; but what good would it do Philip Brent? How would it aid in the revivification of John Dean?

James Collins knew Philip Brent only as Philip Brent. Philip had never told Collins, or any one else in Detroit, his birthplace; had never, even with the opportunity at hand, admitted that he was the grandson of Sour Dean.

So he had to remain Philip Brent. He had created Philip Brent, had labored to bring him into being, and now Philip Brent had taken complete possession.

Then, just as he was despairing, pacing nervously up and down the guest room that he was occupying, there came a flash that lightened his darkness. The suit in the slough—the clothing he had discarded, John Dean's garments, the link that would connect him with the past!

As quickly as he could send his car over the road, he drove to the farther end of the lake. The landmarks were indelibly registered in his mind, and he had no difficulty in locating the exact spot screened by bushes and safe from prying eyes. Nothing had been disturbed, and there were no indications that any one had been there after him.

Taking a long stick, he poked about in the place where his memory told him that the stone-weighted bundle had disappeared. Failing to meet with any obstruction, he began a measured prodding, his calculations as exact as possible.

It was not until twilight that he gave up, defeated. Not even then would he acknowledge failure, the matter was of such vital moment to him. With the coming of daylight he was again at the marsh, laboring until his hands, his arms, and even his face were spattered with muck; but either the material had rotted away, or the bundle had sunk so deeply into the ooze that it could not be reached.

Still, he did not leave Leesville, but cast about for excuses to stay, buying and selling property to occupy his time and to give plausibility to his presence. He received a letter from the Blairs, in which no allusion was made to what Betty Mason had written, but which stated that the forecast of a slump had been correct. For that reason, they told Brent, they would not

engage in any real estate operations for at least a year. There was also another reason for inactivity, for Ethel Blair must soon give all her attention to her home.

The jubilant tone of the letter was like a blow to Philip Brent. A wife, a home, and a child!

Brent threw himself more and more into the affairs of Leesville. He had no plan, no goal. He was merely drifting, though he burned with impatience to accomplish something, to wrest from fate an opportunity to work out his destiny. The replies that James Collins had sent to the letters of inquiry helped him materially, though they were of no assistance in his mental trouble. While they enabled him to assume contracts and obligations, they only established him more firmly in the identity of Philip Brent.

But though the demands of business took much of his time, they did not occupy it entirely, and, whenever free, he was with Grace Moore. In these frequent meetings fate, too, seemed to take a hand. Grace Moore made no advances — it would not have been like her to do so; but when Philip wanted her, whether at the club or in town, he always seemed to encounter her. This seemed to happen so naturally that he gave it no great thought, but merely accepted what fate brought to him.

He had himself well under control, and in the making of money he had a distraction which rendered less keen the desire within him. He had decided that not until he found a way to restore John Dean would he ask Grace Moore to be his wife; but he could see nothing wrong in having as much of her company as possible.

Yet, though Philip Brent had acquired wisdom, his knowledge was not complete. He did not sense the fact that there are times when, no matter what rein a man may think he has placed on his emotions, the human heart takes command and overrides reason.

Summer merged into winter, and winter was gone again. The rhododendrons were blooming on every hillside. The Leesville Country Club was open. How they happened to be alone on the veranda overlooking the lake, he did not know, just as he did not know why he caught Grace's hands, and, holding her with a tense grip, spoke words that could not be repressed.

She did not draw away from him, and his heart leaped tumultuously. The future did not intrude. The past was gone. All that counted was the present.

After all, what did it matter whether he was Philip Brent or John Dean? John Dean had wasted his time, had done wrong. Philip Brent had lived honorably, had accumulated a sufficiency of wealth to be free from anxiety and to give Grace Moore even more than she was enjoying.

Then he knew that she was disengaging her fingers, and he felt her slipping from him.

"No, Phil," she said gently, her reserve force in full control. "It can't be."

Still quietly, still calmly, her poise unimpaired, though there was a new tremolo note in her voice, she told him why. She said frankly that she had given the same answer to another man who had asked her to become his wife—a man who had since married and found happiness. She did not mention his name, and she did not need to do so to Philip Brent, for Nellie Deering was the wife of William Traverse.

Grace's reason was that she loved John Dean—loved him so deeply and unalterably that she could never marry another man. The discovery had come too late, but that did not change her feelings.

Philip Brent dropped his face and covered his eyes with his hands; but he could not shut out the ghost of his dead life.

THE END

MY SHADOW AND I

My shadow and I walk side by side
  In the phantom autumn weather;
On we loiter and on we stride,
  Nodding our heads together;
And I ask myself, as we go by,
Which is the shadow and which is I.
"Both are shadows," we make reply.

Richard Le Gallienne

Romance Is Dead—Long Live Romance!

THE INTERESTING CONTROVERSY BETWEEN CARY MEAD, WHO HAD OLD-FASHIONED IDEAS, AND HIS MODERN WIFE AND DAUGHTERS

By Reita Lambert

"I TELL you it's outrageous! Disgraceful!" Father was in eruption again, and his daughters retired to their customary oases of resigned silence while the flying lava of his indignation piled up around them. "When a man meets his own daughters riding through the main streets of the town in a shocking state of semi-nudity—"

"My dear Cary!" protested his wife.

"Well, that's what it amounts to. I presume they were in their bathing suits, but—"

"Really, Cary, you must be mistaken! The girls wouldn't—"

"We never do, mother! Honestly, we always put our coats on," Phyllis declared hotly.

"It couldn't have been the girls you saw," Mrs. Mead insisted.

"Think I don't know my own car?" her husband retorted. "I was coming up from the station. I tell you the back seat was a jumble of bare arms and legs!"

"We had our cretonne coats on over our suits," Sally maintained.

"Anyway, *we* were in the front seat," her sister added.

"We drove some of the bunch up from the beach," Phyllis recalled. "They all had on capes and things, but they may have slipped off, or something."

The Meads were at dinner, and Mrs. Mead dropped her eyes to her plate to conceal their expression of triumph. These scenes were a little hard on her, for her sympathies were with the girls, and yet she could not openly avow as much and maintain her position as a loyal wife.

Her husband's sporadic eruptions against the younger generation had been occurring for some years, ever since Phyllis, his elder daughter, had put up her hair—or bobbed it, rather, which is the equivalent these days. It was then that he had first questioned the ultimate destination of the new generation. Of late he no longer demanded to know what the world was coming to. He knew! It was not a reassuring outlook for the girls.

To-night Mrs. Mead hoped that, owing to the mistaken identification of the bare arms and legs, the outburst would die of inanition; but no—the floodgates were open. That he had been in the wrong in this one instance determined Mr. Mead to cite others in which he was indubitably in the right.

As a rule, his attitude toward his family was one of easy indulgence. In return for this, he was assiduously protected from the domestic detail which went into the making of his pleasant home life. No small part of this detail consisted of the problems of two growing daughters. Mrs. Mead shouldered these problems admirably, as even her husband conceded; but occasionally—it was generally after a heavy day in town, and before he had had his dinner—he asserted himself.

"Look at that!" he commanded, and directed an accusing forefinger toward a tenuous beaded strap which, with its mate, anchored Sally's silver dance frock to her slender shoulders. "Is that a decent dress for a seventeen-year-old girl?"

Inwardly Sally cursed the straps, while her sister ducked lower over her plate.

" There's nothing wrong with that frock, dear," Mrs. Mead told him quietly.

" You think not?" he marveled.

" My dear Cary, you've seen that frock half a dozen times."

" Does that make it any more decent?" he stormed, and then subsided into awful silence while Annie came in to change the plates.

It was a productive silence, as he proved when the door of the butler's pantry had swung to again. It wasn't only his daughter's dress or the bathing suits, he had decided. These things were simply isolated instances of modern license. There was no such thing as modesty or reticence any more—no such thing as innocence or youth —not what *he* would call youth.

He paused to defy contradiction of this, and glared expectantly from his wife to the bent heads of his daughters—fluffy shingled heads, one dark, one fair. Their silence irritated him, and irritation lent a more tangible outline to his grievance. He became more luminous on the subject. By the time he crammed his napkin down beside his plate and rose from the table, the younger generation stood stripped and shivering on the brink of eternal damnation.

Mrs. Mead preceded him across the hall and into the library. The girls exchanged a swift S O S, and made furtively for the stairs, but their father's voice boomed after them:

" Sally! Phil! Just come in here for a moment!"

They came and stood, two young seedlings, lovely as spring, against the dark paneling of the door. Mr. Mead looked them up and down before he spoke.

" I gather you're going out again. May I ask where?"

" Why, just over to the—to the club to dance," stammered Phil, and threw a glance of entreaty toward her mother.

" Indeed! And with whom?"

" Why, with Jack Pride and Bud Holliday and—oh, some of the crowd."

" And pray *who* are Jack Pride and Bud Holliday?"

" My dear Cary," his wife broke in desperately, " they're both perfectly nice boys. I know them very well."

" I just put the question," he explained with awful gentleness, " to show how little I know of the girls' activities. How does it happen that I've never met these young men?"

" I didn't think you'd care to be bothered, Cary. I thought you had confidence in my judgment. You're generally absorbed in other things—"

Than which she could have said nothing more incautious. The fact that it was true fired Mr. Mead to prove its fallacy. Obviously, the best way to do this was to assert his authority.

" Nonsense!" he fumed. " I've never met these young men, for the same reason that I'm never consulted on any other question regarding my own daughters. Half the time they're out without my knowing where—"

" Mother always knows," Phyllis cut in, but he waved her to silence with a peremptory forefinger.

" Yes, but father doesn't, because you know that father wouldn't approve of a good many things that you put over on mother. You're quite right. One of the things I don't approve of is your running out five nights in a week. Five parties in seven days is—"

" But they're not all parties, dad!" wailed Sally.

" What do you call 'em?"

" I mean, half the time we just go for a drive, or over to the Rustic Shop for ice cream, or down to the beach."

" The point is that you *do* go out," he maintained severely. " You're not happy unless you're on the go. That's another curse of this jazz age—this infernal restlessness. It shouldn't be cultivated. It's demoralizing. All summer you've used this house as if it was a hotel instead of a home —just a place to eat and sleep. Well, it's got to stop. You can go to your party tonight, but the rest of this week you stay home!"

From the dejected faces of his daughters he turned his contentious gaze toward his wife. She had drifted across to the chair where her sewing bag hung, and sat there wrapped in noncommittal silence, which, after a horrified moment, the girls charged desperately.

" Mother, won't you tell dad—"

" Honestly, dad, mother can tell you—"

" My dears," Mrs. Mead said mildly, without looking up from her sewing bag, " your father's probably quite right. It won't hurt you to stay at home the rest of the week."

" Hurt them!" he repeated scornfully. " Good Heavens, anybody would think I'd

threatened to lock 'em up on a bread and water diet! Pretty sad state of affairs, I'd call it, when children consider it a calamity to stay at home! Why, the happiest recollections I have are associated with my own home—not with any clubs or cafés. If we wanted a dance or a party, we used to have it at home. Isn't that so, Edie? How many home parties do young people have nowadays "

" Styles in amusement change like anything else, Cary," his wife said quietly.

" Why, I had my birthday party here only last week," Sally reminded him eagerly. " Don't you remember—"

" The only thing I remember about that party," he snapped, " is that after you'd tried the new dance records I gave you, and finished the food, you piled out and stayed out until two o'clock in the morning!"

" There was a dance at the yacht club, and some one suggested that we might go over," Phyllis explained.

" There you are!" he gloated. " You don't want a home—you want a dance floor and a caterwauling saxophone. By Jove, when I was young and we gave a party, we gave a party! We didn't have to fall back on any dance club. We furnished our own entertainment. We played games — Jerusalem, and blindman's buff, and spin the plate. We had candy pulls, and popped corn. If we wanted music, we made it ourselves; and after it was over, we boys got together and went around and serenaded our girls. A party was good wholesome fun in those days, and our guests stayed till it was over, too!"

The restive rustling of the two young seedlings by the door dispelled the pleasant vision he had evoked. He relinquished it with a sigh and released the culprits.

" Well, run along; but mind—the rest of the week you stay at home. If your friends want to come here, all right. If that's too dull for 'em, they're not what I'd call friends!"

After the girls had gone, their father strolled to the window, saw that it was too dark to make his usual tour of the garden, and came back to his favorite chair. He settled himself in its bulbous embrace with an ostentatious grunt directed at his wife's provocative serenity. He was reading Boswell's " Life of Johnson," and now he found the volume, fluffed the leaves, and adjusted his glasses. He looked reproachfully over their rims at his wife.

" Those were the days of romance, Edie," he announced. " No such thing as romance any more. Romance is dead!"

" I don't think so," she said quietly. " I fancy that she has just changed her mode of dress and bobbed her hair, so that we don't recognize her. I wager if you saw her now, as you used to know her, you'd think her rather odd yourself."

" Humph! Maybe. Just the same, young people don't know how to enjoy life any more. They're too sophisticated."

He was lighting a cigar as he spoke. It was a remarkably good cigar.

Silence settled over the big, homelike room with its broad desk and deep fireplace and book-banked walls. Voices came faintly through the open windows. Crickets chirped, and a whippoorwill tuned up for his evening performance. Mr. Mead loved these summer evenings on his old Westchester place, with a book, a cigar, and Mrs. Mead sitting under her favorite lamp with her sewing and a magazine.

She was sitting there now, very quiet and inscrutable. She knew that by morning her husband would have forgotten his outburst, as he already, doubtless, had forgotten its origin. It wasn't fair of him to disrupt the household in this fashion and leave her to deal with the unpleasant after effects. No, it wasn't quite fair!

II

On the following morning Mrs. Mead awaited her daughters' appearance in the breakfast room with a good deal of disquiet. She knew that they had become more or less inured to these occasional uprisings of their father. They usually bore them with the shrewd resignation of youth; but this one had left catastrophe in its wake. It had anchored their freedom.

Fortunately, Mr. Mead was well on his way to the city before they came down, demure and radiant in vestal white, but primed for battle. One glance at their father's vacant chair, and Sally exploded.

" Do you think he meant it, mums?" she inquired.

" Why he had to gum up the works at this stage of the game—" Phyllis took her sister up.

" And vacation nearly over, too!" wailed Sally.

" Sit down and eat your grapefruit, girls. Annie wants to clear away."

They sat down, still rumbling ominously.

"Treats us as if we were five and six, instead of seventeen and eighteen," mumbled Sally, with her mouth full.

"Look at the mess it puts *me* into!" snorted Phil. "I promised to go over to Greenwich to-night with Ted McCullum."

"It isn't fair, making us stay in because he saw some girls that weren't *us* in their bathing suits!"

Mrs. Mead pinched back a smile. She had forgotten the bathing suits.

"Mother, can't you *do* something?" Phil was pleading dismally.

"My dears, I can't oppose your father's wishes," she said mildly. "Besides. I agree with him that four nights at home are not going to kill you."

"But what are we going to do about our dates?"

"Well!" She hesitated, as if considering the problem. "Your father didn't say you weren't to have company. You might invite the boys and girls over—give a party here."

"Now *ain't* we got fun?" purred Sally piously.

"And have dad bust out right in the middle of it, and deliver a curtain speech on the depravity of jazz! He might, in this mood."

"But you needn't have jazz," their mother said, and added, as if with a sudden impulse: "Why not have an old-fashioned party such as dad described? It would be very novel—and amusing, too."

She got up and strolled nonchalantly to the door.

"Suppose you come upstairs and talk it over after you've finished breakfast?" she suggested.

Once out of the range of those troubled young eyes, she grinned. A broad, impudent grin it was, quite worthy of the irrepressible Sally herself.

When Mr. Mead came home to dinner that evening, he would have had no fault to find with his daughters' frocks, even if he had noticed them — which he didn't. His grudge against the younger generation was like his lumbago—a periodic stab now and then at his habitual serenity. To-night he was quite normal, though he was loquacious on the subject of a new business deal.

"McCullum's got that Chicago man I was telling you about — Seaman — up to spend the night with him." McCullum was Mr. Mead's business partner, whose summer home was not far from the Meads'. "He's going to bring him over some time during the evening."

Mrs. Mead said that that was fine, and Mr. Mead said that it was a good stroke of business on Ed McCullum's part, getting Seaman up there.

After dinner he made his usual tour of the garden, and it was dusk when he stepped back through the French windows into the snug sanctum of his library. He installed himself in the bulbous chair, found Mr. Boswell, and lit a cigar.

It was perhaps half an hour later when a legion of small sounds began to gnaw the outer bulwarks of the silence—the chug of a motor, the whir of the doorbell, a door slamming, footsteps, voices. The sturdiest concentration on Boswell failed to shut them out.

He was laboring through a paragraph for the third time when a light tap sounded on his door, and Phyllis fluttered in. She was followed by a leggy young man in dinner clothes, with an inflamed shock of hair like the crest of a tropical parrakeet.

"May we come in, dad? I want to introduce Dick Fraley. Mother said you'd want to meet him. Come along, Dick, and shake hands with my parent."

Dick came along with a sort of sidewise action, as if that method of locomotion would tend to make him less conspicuous. Mr. Mead stood up.

"Dick's not at his best with parents," Phyllis explained kindly, as the young gentleman convulsively grabbed and dropped her father's outstretched hand.

"Pleased t' know you, Mr. Mead," he gasped, and fell silent.

It was a terrible silence. In Mr. Mead's conversational supply there didn't seem to be a single casual commonplace to fit the occasion.

"Seems to me I've met your father—Sam Fraley?" he finally hazarded.

"That's the gov'nor!" agreed Mr. Samuel Fraley's son.

"Well, well, you don't say! Fine man!"

"Gov'nor's all right, and I don't mean maybe!" bayed the youth warmly.

Phyllis hopped down from the chair arm where she had been perched, and reclaimed her charge.

"There's the bell! S'cuse, dad! Come along, Dick!"

Dick achieved the door by a more direct route this time, and vanished, leaving in his wake a promise to "see you later."

Mr. Mead sank into his chair and searched out the elusive paragraph once more. He had perused almost half of it when a second tap on his door announced another visitor.

This time it was Sally. Sally had a pair of white trousers in tow—reluctant white trousers that hovered in the shadows near the door.

"Dad," she said, "here's Jack Pride. Mother said to bring him in, but he's afraid of parents." Mr. Mead got out of his chair. "Come on, Jack! You know we always dope the lions before admitting visitors!"

Thus urged, Mr. Pride came forward with something of a swagger, pulverized Mr. Mead's fingers, and said heartily:

"'S'pleasure!"

"When I told Jack that you wanted to meet him—" Sally began, but she got no farther.

"Quotes are barred, Sal," Mr. Pride pronounced. "Play dead. You're all wet!"

Mr. Mead cast a startled glance at his daughter's diaphanous frock, but Phil's voice interrupted the inspection:

"You there, Sal? Dad, this is Bud Holliday. Be gentle with him—he has a valvular lesion. Pick up your feet, Bud—I forgot to tack down the rugs!"

There were six more during the next fifteen minutes—eight, all told, and as many young women. They were more articulate in group formation, Mr. Mead discovered, when Sally appeared with a batch of four, but even less intelligible. When Phil had given the eighth entrant the cue for his exit, Mr. Mead lifted his voice:

"Phyllis, I'd like a word with you."

"All right," she said, and propelled her charge through the door. "Follow the arrow, Lucy," she advised, and turned back to her father.

"What did you call that young man?" he asked.

"Lucy. His name's Lucius—serves him right, doesn't it?"

"Perhaps," he agreed gently. "Look here, Phil, is that all?"

"All the bunch? Well, it's all I invited. Of course, some more may pop in. Why?"

"Oh, nothing—nothing; but may I ask why I have been—er—honored in this fashion to-night?"

"Why, *dad!* You said last night you didn't know any of our crowd, and so to-night mother said—"

"Oh! Yes, yes, I see!" He waved her off. "Quite right, too. Glad to know 'em. Nice young folks—close the door, my dear."

Nice! Why, they were ghastly! He dropped back into his chair and reached for his handkerchief. He had never realized it before, but youth like that was a calamity—nothing short of a calamity!

III

WITH the door closed and the "crowd" corralled in the big living room across the hall, Mr. Mead attempted to recapture his bibliophilic mood, and picked up his book. He had not yet found his place when he jerked upright in his chair. He had been vaguely aware that some one was playing the piano, and that it had stopped with a crash in the middle of a bar. There followed a series of violent percussions that rocked the solid old house on its foundation and set the chandeliers to shuddering. Then came a cacophony of wild screams and groans.

He was halfway to the door when his wife opened it and looked in.

"I thought you might wonder about the noise," she explained pleasantly. "It's just the children playing Jerusalem. At least," she qualified, "they *said* they were going to play Jerusalem, and it rather sounds as if they were doing it."

"It rather sounds," he corrected sibilantly, "as if they were trying to give an imitation of Santa Barbara!"

"They're giving an old-fashioned party, you see, and they heard you talking about Jerusalem last night—what fun it was." She smiled at him and made briskly for the door. "I must go and see if cook has finished up. They want to have a candy pull later."

Her husband went back to his chair and lit a fresh cigar; but between his shaken nerves and the dynamic activities of the living room, the sensation of sitting on a rocking stone was a little too vivid, so he took his cigar out on the terrace. Here he paraded under a distinctly chilly moon for a quarter of an hour. At the end of that time he stepped cautiously back into the library and cocked his ear in the direction of the living room. Then, with a grunt of satisfaction, he salvaged his book and sat down.

He had not yet opened the book when a stealthy sound at his door impelled his

glance in that direction. The sound ceased, but slowly and silently the door began to swing inward. With his arms clutching the chair arms, he watched it until, after a moment, a vivid patch of scarlet appeared in the aperture, about midway between the floor and ceiling. It hung there for an instant, like a detached, inflamed eye, before Mr. Mead recognized it as the parrakeetic crest of the leggy young man.

Recognition, however, brought no sense of relief when Dick Fraley's solemn countenance followed his hair, and his body oozed through the orifice and flattened itself against the door. His eyes made a swift survey of the room, and came to rest on Mr. Mead. He laid a finger on his lips and started across the room. Mr. Mead half rose.

"What the—"

"Sh!" warned Mr. Fraley, and started a tour of inspection on tiptoe.

A flock of alarming conjectures swarmed into Mr. Mead's mind as the intruder began to peer under the chairs and tables and behind the desk. At last he paused and snickered gently. He pointed to the tapestry screen that flanked the deep fireplace, and whispered hoarsely:

"Just the place! May I?"

"M-may you what?"

"Hide there," explained Mr. Fraley, still hoarsely. "We're playing a game—sardines. Just the place—if you don't mind!"

"G-go ahead," invited Mr. Mead. "Help yourself!"

With a bob of thanks, Mr. Fraley ducked his parrakeetic crest and vanished.

"Don't you give me away, will you?" he rasped.

"N-no, I won't," his host promised, and jumped suddenly, as if a bomb had gone off beneath his feet. The first sardine had sounded its warning.

"Oo-*hoo!*" signaled Mr. Fraley loudly and earnestly.

At the signal, the sounds as of a myriad overgrown rats beset the house. They began to scurry and squeak, to patter up and down the stairs and thump over Mr. Mead's head.

After five minutes of this, the library door opened again. A pretty girl looked in, grinned at Mr. Mead, and pleaded for admission in pantomime. At his nod, she slipped inside and began to flutter about the room, peering under and over and behind the furniture. A soft giggle finally announced her triumph.

"Well, of all the ten minute eggs!" Mr. Mead heard her crow, and then: "Move over!" Once more his taut nerves contracted. "Oo-*hoo!*" sounded the pretty girl shrilly.

He had thought the game was over, but no—sardines, it appeared, was a new version of hide and seek. In sardines, once the seeker finds his prey, he also becomes one of the sought. Thus there were thirteen more invasions, thirteen more signals—with the fireplace spilling arms and legs and sounding like an industrious beehive—before the climax came with a wild scramble and dismal shrieks of defeat from the last sardine.

When he was alone again, Mr. Mead surveyed the wreckage of his hitherto inviolate sanctum. The fire screen was flat on the floor. Several treasured old chairs lay on their backs. The rugs were crumpled wads. Resolutely, Mr. Mead rose and rang the bell.

"Look here, Annie—just clear up this mess; but first ask Mrs. Mead to—oh, there you are!" He made an indistinct noise in his throat. "L-look at this, Edith!"

Mrs. Mead looked.

"The naughty things!" she said indulgently. "Of course they shouldn't have come in here; but they're having *such* a good time! Really it's wonderful, the way they've entered into the spirit of the thing. Doesn't it take you back to your own youth—these old-fashioned games and all? That's all right, Annie. What did you say, dear?"

"N-nothing. Look here, Edith! You know I'm expecting Ed McCullum and Seaman any minute. I wish you'd tell those kids—"

"That's so—you won't want to be disturbed while they're here. I'll speak to Phil."

She went out briskly, and came back at once to reassure him.

"It's all right, dear—they won't come in here again. Phil says it was Dick's fault. He thought this would be such a good place to hide. I told them that if they had all the rest of the house to frolic in—"

She broke off to welcome Mr. Mead's partner and the Chicago financier as Annie ushered them in. Mr. Mead produced cigars and his most cordial manner. For

the moment the house was quiet—ominously quiet; but there was a strained look about Mr. Mead's eyes, and a restlessness about his hands and feet, which a hearty nonchalance did not altogether conceal.

For the space of ten minutes he sat under a Damoclean sword before it fell. Mr. Seaman, a venerable gentleman with impressive whiskers, was in the midst of a profound observation on the subject of Middle Western finance when he broke off abruptly, his eyes stretching.

"Why, what's that?" demanded Mr. McCullum. "Sounds like an air raid!"

"It's only the children," Mrs. Mead assured him smilingly.

"The chil—"

"Then you have little ones!" guessed Mr. Seaman, relieved.

"Not little, exactly. They're both in college; but they're having a party tonight. They're playing games—puss in the corner, I believe."

The visitor looked sharply from his host's wife to his host, pursed his lips, and said dryly:

"Well, well!"

But Mr. McCullum enjoyed the privileges of an intimate.

"Puss in the corner!" he echoed incredulously. "You don't mean that your girls—"

"I don't *know* that it's puss in the corner," Mrs. Mead admitted candidly. "It may be hunt the slipper or spin the plate. They were looking up old-time games in the encyclopedia to-day. You see, they're having an old-fashioned party."

"And you stand for it!" marveled Mr. McCullum grimly. "By George, you've got sounder nerves than most folks these days."

"They *are* a bit noisy," Mrs. Mead agreed; "but it's good, wholesome fun, as Mr. Mead says. You see, this old-fashioned party was his idea. Cary thinks the modern amusements are so sophisticated."

Mr. Mead smiled biliously.

"Well, so they are," he said with feeble belligerence.

"They're a darned sight more civilized than *that!*" his partner snorted, as an especially vigorous barrage reached them. "If that doesn't sound like a lot of barbaric morons—"

"You see," Mrs. Mead was explaining sweetly to the astonished gentleman from Chicago, "Mr. Mead described a typical old-fashioned party to the girls, and they're repeating it in every detail, as closely as possible." She turned to Mr. McCullum. "All the boys and girls around here are enchanted with the idea. I expect there'll be quite an epidemic of old-fashioned parties before the summer is over. I heard your Ted—Ted's in there, you know—say that he was going to give one at your house next week."

"Oh, *is* he?" Ted's father said darkly. "Is he, indeed?"

Mrs. Mead nodded smilingly, and rose to leave.

"I must go and see how cook's coming along with the refreshments, if you'll excuse me."

She had to raise her voice. The library was like the inside of a drum.

Ten minutes later she sent Annie in with coffee for her husband and his guests, and was amazed at the immediate return of both maid and untouched tray.

"The gentlemen couldn't wait for coffee," Annie explained. "Mr. Mead's gone upstairs."

Mr. Mead had made the ascent to his room with youthful alacrity. Blindman's buff was in progress downstairs, and it was only with the nicest calculation that he had escaped capture. Once inside his room, he disrobed and climbed into bed. Then he bounced up again to turn the key in its lock. There was a greenish shadow about his mouth, and a menacing light shone in his eyes; but he had brought Mr. Boswell along, and the uproar from downstairs came to him thinly enough not to be too distracting.

Resolutely he put all thought of that frustrated interview with the Chicago financier from his mind. Resolutely he concentrated on his book. In fifteen minutes his pulse had become almost normal and the printed words before him almost legible; but on the stroke of the sixteenth, chaos broke out directly beneath him. The kitchen was directly underneath Mr. Mead's room, and the candy pull had been launched.

IV

If Mr. Mead had been in his usual benignant frame of mind, he would at least have rejoiced that the old-fashioned party culminated—riotously, it is true—soon after midnight; but by the time merciful silence descended upon the house, it seemed

to his exhausted nerves that dawn must already be stalking across the lawns. He was telling himself that he might as well get up, when he fell into a blissful, dreamless sleep.

Of course, it is impossible to calculate how long this precious oblivion lasted; but presently Mr. Mead began to dream. He dreamed that he and Ed McCullum had lured the Chicago financier into the peaceful grill of their club, with the intention of blotting out the ill effects produced upon that gentleman by the old-fashioned party.

In his dream, Mr. Mead was in the midst of an eloquent harangue, to which the Chicago man was lending the most flattering attention, when quite suddenly Ed McCullum began to sing. Mr. Mead was horrified. He could feel the financier's attention wavering. Pretty soon he, too, was singing. The next thing the dreamer knew, Ed McCullum had taken a portable guitar out of his pocket, and Mr. Seaman a banjo, and the pair of them began to warble, in close harmony, " Seeing Nelly Home."

The potency of Mr. Mead's indignation wakened him. He lay blinking for a moment in the darkness before he realized that the singers had indeed followed him into consciousness. The room was full of sound —of the twang of strings and melodious male voices escorting *Nelly* to her parental domicile.

Mr. Mead hopped out of bed and padded swiftly to the window. Halfway across the room he stumbled over something sharp. It was a corner of Mr. Boswell, lying where he had thrown it a few hours before.

Hugging an injured toe, Mr. Mead achieved the window and peered out. The light of a full moon, slanting through the trees, showed him half a dozen masculine figures grouped on the terrace below. Here were the guitar and banjo of his dream, and a rich assortment of voices, with the tenors predominating. Their conscientious regard for tempo and expression was very effective.

For a moment he hovered there on the wings of indecision. Half a dozen times he made an abortive gesture toward the serenaders. There were noises in his throat like static on the radio, but he could not speak until they had disposed of *Nelly*.

The nights were growing chilly, and Mr. Mead's legs were prickled with gooseflesh while he waited. Then he heard his wife's voice behind him.

" My dear! Serenaders!" She came across the room dragging on a negligee. " Where are they?"

" Under my window!"

" Really? Let's see! Why don't you put on your bath robe, Cary?"

By the time she reached the window, an elongated wail was announcing the romantic disposition of *Nelly*. Plunging his arms into the sleeves of his bath robe, Mr. Mead advanced resolutely to the window.

" Why, no, dear—they're under the girls' windows," Mrs. Mead was telling him in a hoarse whisper. The girls' windows also overlooked the terrace. " Listen! They're awake, too!"

" So's everybody in the county awake, if you ask me," he bleated, as a series of stifled giggles seeped in to them. " Here, let me—"

" The romantic youngsters!" gurgled his wife. " Think of them coming back to serenade the girls just because they heard Phyllis talking about the way you used to do it when you were young! Why, they must have been practicing those old songs ever since they left here! Listen to that!"

Mr. Mead listened. The songsters had launched " Little Annie Rooney " with unabated vigor and intensity.

" Isn't it sweet? The boys sing very well, don't they? My dear, why don't you button up that robe, if you're so cold? Why, your teeth are actually chattering!" Mrs. Mead would have come closer to the mark if she had said " gnashing." " I think we ought to give them something, don't you?"

" G-give—"

" What would you think of some hot coffee and cake?" She was already hurrying toward the door. " Don't you want to come down?"

" N-no," Mr. Mead said. " No, I think I'd better stay up here!"

V

When Mr. Mead came down to breakfast, on the following morning, his wife smiled a greeting from behind the coffee urn.

" You're a little late, dear—or are you going to take a later train?"

" Guess I can make the eight fifty," he mumbled, and drew up his chair.

He avoided her eyes. His own had a hunted look, and there were haggard lines around his mouth. He reached blindly for the pile of letters beside his plate.

"What's this?" he said, as he picked up an unstamped envelope.

"The Marshes' maid brought it over early this morning," his wife told him. "What can they want, I wonder?"

But Mr. Mead was reading the note that the Marshes' maid had brought over early that morning. The Marshes owned the place adjoining the Meads'. The note was signed by Mrs. Marsh, and read:

MY DEAR MR. MEAD:

I hesitate to venture a complaint against as excellent a neighbor as you have proved yourself to be. Personally, I would tolerate much before doing so, but, as you know, my mother is staying with me this summer, and she is in very delicate health. A broken night adds immeasurably to her sufferings. I've no doubt that last night's performance would have been considered highly romantic fifty years ago, but this is the twentieth century, and the nerves of this generation are not what they used to be. It seems to me that hooligans and serenaders are equally *de trop* in this day and age—

Mr. Mead did not lift his eyes to the next page. He was staring exultantly through the paper. It was with difficulty that he restrained an impulse to kiss it.

During the night, or during such part of the night as had been left to him, his wife's words had haunted him—"an epidemic of old-fashioned parties." It was in the chilly dawn that he had recalled the mandate he had issued—a mandate that would keep his daughters at home for three more nights—nights in which regiments of playful youths would, under his daughters' tutelage, emulate the prankish activities of a generation denied the civilizing influences of radio and jazz. He had seen no way of escape. He himself had disinterred this monstrous shade, and he dared not lift a hand to lay it low; but now he was saved, and without cost to his own prestige.

Really he must send that poor nervous old lady next door some flowers! He would make a note of it.

"Well, what do they want, dear? What does the note say?"

He looked up from the missive. The haggard lines had left his mouth, and his eyes were flashing in a beautiful simulation of anger.

"Why, it's outrageous! They're complaining—about last night!"

"Complaining?"

"About the noise. I told you there was no such thing as romance any more. Bunch of cranks—that's what they are, complaining about a little wholesome fun like that! Humph!"

He took a swallow of coffee and glanced furtively at his wife over the cup.

"But what do they *say?*"

"Say? That they'll go to law, if necessary." Angrily he tore the note across. "They say we're disturbing the peace. Ridiculous!" He dipped into his cup again. "Well, after all, I suppose they've got the law on their side."

"What a shame!" mourned Mrs. Mead. "And the girls were going to give an old-fashioned barn dance to-night—"

"Better not," he said quickly. "Too bad, of course, but tell 'em—well, tell 'em they can go over to the club to dance, if they want to. What's the use of my keeping them in, if they can't have a little fun in their own house? I'll call up Marsh to-day and try to make peace with him."

His voice trailed off. He concentrated severely on his toast and coffee. His wife's lips quivered, but she was wise, and kept her twinkling gaze glued meekly to her plate.

"I'll tell the girls," she said quietly. "More toast, dear?"

"Heigho!" he said, helping himself. "No such thing as romance any more, Edie. Romance is dead!"

"Long live romance!" finished Mrs. Mead softly.

TREASURE

ONCE barks put out from Sidon
With glint of saffron sails;
Once camels climbed from Sidon
With weight of precious bales.

But all of Sidon's treasure,
Its wondrous deep-sea trove,
Is but a scanty measure
Compared with her I love!

Ross Hamilton

A Sea Secret

THE STORY OF A MIRACLE WROUGHT BY LOVE

By Julian Hawthorne

THE broad hotel veranda commanded a view of the board walk, and across it to the horizon of the Pacific. It was after midnight, and the sauntering throngs had thinned out. The groups became detached, they gave place to single couples, and then to individuals, insignificant against the background of sea and sky.

The sky was cloudless, the sea glassy calm, except for the low undulations that scattered the image of the moon into a long-drawn dance of golden gleams. The romantic satellite was nearly twenty days old, and was keeping very late hours. She was dwindling, but what was left of her still retained the charm of her virgin youth and of her full maturity.

The last of the couples were passing by. They paused, and the voice of the girl said:

"Isn't that new moon sweet? I just love to see it rising over the wide ocean!"

The man was lighting a cigarette, and his utterance was indistinct. We may assume that it conveyed a correction of the young lady's distorted astronomy. They passed on.

The board walk was now vacant. Vacant, too, was the hotel veranda, save for a couple of cushioned wicker chairs, drawn up close, and containing the two old gentlemen who had been sitting there for hours—almost since dinner was over. They were fitfully chatting and puffing at the butts of their final cigars.

"You see, Tom, a fellow like me, forty years in the profession, has seen a lot of queer things—things, I mean, that he can't explain; and this nephew of yours looks to me a case in point. We've got names for it, of course—hallucination, illusion. He sees what isn't there, and talks with 'em sometimes; but illusions are realities to the mind that conceives them, and may lead to concrete results. Take Mrs. Thingumbob at the tea fight yesterday, for instance, telling fortunes by teacup grounds, or cards, or palmistry."

"She tells 'em, but they ain't so!" muttered Tom.

"No, but without the lines in your palm, or the tea grounds, or the cards, her faculty, or humbug, wouldn't operate; and her prediction may influence a man to lose a deal on the market, or a girl to listen to the young fellow with the dark hair, and those are realities. I'm not explaining, you know—only drawing an analogy."

"I don't see the analogy. Jack sometimes thinks he sees the girl in the room, speaks to her, and gets mad because we don't notice her. He's not in an excited state, either. He lies around like a log—sleeps all night, the nurse says, and doesn't seem half awake in the daytime."

"Inert outwardly, yes; but who's to tell what's going on inside?"

"The same as what goes on in a jellyfish, I should say! Why, till this infernal thing happened, the boy was quite an athlete—running, tennis, polo, and so on. He won a swimming match over at Atlantic City this summer. Swimming—ah, I wish he'd never been near the water! That was how he met her, you know."

"Do you know the girl? Have you seen her?"

"Oh, yes—she's easy to look at, as the boys say. For anything I know to the contrary, she may be straight enough morally, too; but after giving her the benefit of all doubts, the creature is utterly impossible for people of our sort. Why, she's a rank professional—competes in public matches—travels about the country with a gang of the same sort, giving 'exhibitions,' with expenses paid, of course! The sport editors of the papers run photographs of her in her

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swimming togs—and you know what they are—labeled 'champion lady swimmer and diver.' On the other hand, there's Jack, bred a gentleman, innocent as a baby, and only twenty. It's a plain case of infatuation. He doesn't know her in any right sense of the word. He doesn't know anything! Next year he'll be coming into an estate worth more than half a million, and I had intended, when I peg out, to let him have pretty nearly as much as that of my own; but I'm blessed if I'll give my good money to be splashed and scattered about by any little human porpoise like this girl! I've been hoping he'd get over it. I rushed him over to this side of the continent, on the 'out of sight out of mind' principle. That was three months ago, and he's as bad as ever, or worse. If she knew where he was—why, for half a million dollars, or for one-tenth of it, she'd undertake to swim across the Atlantic! Our best chance is that she may not locate him. I'd carry him over to Chinese Tartary, if it came to that! Possibly, though, knowing that I'm on guard, she'll understand that the jig is up; but I'm losing weight on it."

"Have you arranged that they don't communicate by letter?"

"Oh, absolutely! Every letter that comes here is seen by me before it goes upstairs to his rooms, and the nurse is on the lookout, too. She's a reliable person—middle-aged, none of your coquettish young professionals. Jack hasn't been outside his suite since we came here. I can't get him out, in fact. Sometimes I almost wish he'd try to give us the slip. It would be a sign of life, at least; but he's simply a dormouse. If you speak to him, he just grins, or grunts, or shakes his head. It's unnatural. What's to be done?"

"Speaking as a doctor—or, in fact, as a man of common sense—I should say, let the boy alone. You call it infatuation; then it will wear out by degrees, in the absence of the provocative cause. If it's real love at first sight, and mutual—such things have been, Tom—then send for her. In other words, if it is of the spirit, and not merely of the flesh—that is, if the flesh is moved only through the inspiration of the spirit—the one cure is unconditional surrender on your part. All things mortal have their term, but this thing, love, is immortal, and keeps terms of its own. I know that isn't language that would be sanctioned by the profession; but doctors who don't upon occasion venture beyond the picket fence of their professional creed have something yet to learn. However," he broke off with a chuckle, "I leave you at liberty to say that I'm as big a fool as you are!"

He pulled out his watch.

"My stars!" he cried out. "Do you know what time it is? This is the hour for lovers, not for old duffers of sixty! The moon herself will be abed in half an hour. Come on—we must beat her to it!"

They got up from their chairs and shuffled off. Had they sat there a little longer, things might have developed differently.

II

JACK, in his gray silk pyjamas, lay on his back on his bed, with his eyes half open. In the adjoining room slept the nurse, snoring faithfully. The door between was ajar; but to get to the hallway, Jack would have to pass through her room, the key to the door of which was under her pillow. The open window beside which he lay was on the third floor of the hotel, with a drop of forty feet to the cement pavement below; so the good woman had her patient safe enough, and might take naps with a clear conscience. Jack was a well bred boy, and had never betrayed a suicidal tendency.

His window faced the west, and the moon, low down, shone through it and rested on his face. Moonlight is said to generate strange dreams sometimes; but Jack didn't appear to be asleep, and he gave no sign of being affected by the celestial beauty outspread before him. For him, all loveliness of earth and sky was gathered into one girl's face.

But, as he moodily gazed, the moon was all at once eclipsed.

How could that happen, without authorization of the almanac? The earth's shadow does not fall on a waning moon. The sky was cloudless.

He raised himself on his elbow, and looked intently. He now perceived that the obscuration of the satellite was caused by the intervention of somebody's head and shoulders, the arms resting on the window sill, almost within reach of Jack's hand.

A burglar? No, the head was feminine, and this was before the day of contemporary improvements in burglary. The face, dark against the light, and yet luminous, was that of a young girl, her hair floating about her in the faint air drawing inward from the sea. Her shoulders and arms were

bare, and her features—why, it was she herself, of course!

The happiness that flooded through him at the sight was hardly mingled with surprise. He had known that she would come—that the ceaseless call of his spirit to hers must be answered at last. He had not, it is true, expected her to appear at that particular moment, or in that manner; but the spirit's ways and epochs are not ours. Love is a worker of miracles, and she was here!

The reality of her outdid even his lover's memory of her.

Her eyes were love, joy, and invitation, and she beckoned with her hand. Then she laid a finger on her lips. Yes, silence! Those snores from the next room mustn't be interrupted!

With a soundless, easy movement Jack transferred himself from the bed to the sill, and was seated lightly upon it, his feet swinging free in empty air. The window had no fire escape, but an iron ladder and platform communicated with the suite adjoining his, and were not more than a couple of yards to the right. He glanced downward for footing. The ledge above the window below afforded it, and an architectural excrescence on the side of the house came conveniently to his hand.

It was a simple matter for athletes like the girl and himself to effect the transit. She was already standing on the landing, and, as she turned to go down the stairway, she kindled him with her smile. Quickly and quietly they went down the ladder, she always a little in advance.

An L of the building threw a passing shadow over them. Jack took small heed of the route, but presently they were out on the board walk. Jack, in his gray pyjamas, was almost invisible in the fantastic light, and only the eyes of love could have discerned her as she flitted on before him; but the houses were all asleep, and there was none to see.

Her hair floated out behind her as she now and again glanced back at him over her shoulders. He lengthened his step to come up with her, but she, without seeming to hasten, maintained the interval of two or three paces. There were moments when the subtle rays from the sinking moon had the effect of making her appear to dissolve quite away; but, again, yonder glimmered the beloved figure!

What dress she wore he could not tell. It might have been pale films of seaweed falling ribbonlike around her; and from her he perceived a faint refreshing scent, as of the sea.

When they came abreast of the great pier, which extended far seaward, like a bridge to the moon, she turned toward it. The big gates were closed, but she opened a small door on the right. Here a little flight of steps led down to a narrow footway below the level of the main deck. It had no guard rail, and the tide beneath lapped softly about the pillars upholding the structure. Outward, illimitably, undulated the Pacific, a vast, friendly creature, all freedom and purity. It slumbered in a waking dream of immortality.

On a narrow shelf above it stood the girl, poised for the plunge. It was at the extremity of the pier. The shore, with its dark buildings, lay like a shadow behind, with the long array of board walk lamps sparkling above the surf line.

Girlish and beautiful she was, her hair thrown back, her smooth arms lifted above her head, her body, naked as a pearl, tapering in flowing curves to her white feet—a nymph of the prime, supple and free; and he a young triton, her lover and mate. With a jolt of the pulses he felt that they had left the solid earth behind them forever, and were on the brink of the realm which keeps its identity through endless changes, to match the immortal growing of the soul.

She seemed to rise from her perch, at the same time with a forward impulse, and her body passed through a wide arc and clove the water soundlessly. At once he followed her. He felt himself sinking deep and deeper into moony profundities, cool and clear. Deeper yet, till a gray-green obscurity enveloped him, and he became conscious of a pang of the heart, a struggle of the breath, and a slight anxiety lest he might lose her trail in the growing darkness. The darkness was very dark, and in his ears came a booming sound, which died away.

"Love, where are you?"

Why, she was here, close, her white side touching his own! They were moving forward without effort in a sphere of liquid chrysoprase. His arm was around her, the softness of her hair clung to his shoulder. She turned her head, and deeper than the sea was the virgin passion which her eyes poured into his and received from them. Their lips met.

They rose up from the abyss in slow, buoyant pulsations, rhythmical with the beating of their hearts. The oceanic coolness gratefully clothed their inward fire. The softness of her young bosom touched his face—a dream of Paradise!

No, not a dream! The life preceding this had been the dream, from which they were now awakened. Sense was flooded out in intuitions of the soul, revealing things too good and true for sense to comprehend.

III

"WHO would ever have believed it?" lamented the nurse.

She had awakened at her customary six o'clock, to find her patient's bed vacant. A look from the window had showed no crushed body on the pavement below. No suspicion of the fire escape had visited her mind. By what miracle had he vanished?

"Me, if I sleep at all, it's with one eye open and both ears, you might say," she assured the old uncle and the doctor, distraught in their bed gowns. "Quieter than any mouse he must have been. He couldn't have gone by the door, the key being under my pillow—and here it is! I'm plain mystified, and that's God's truth!"

When the search reached the pier, the custodian could affirm that the gates had been locked. The small side door used by the workmen—well, he wouldn't just take his oath, but the regulation was to bolt it on the inside. But—well!

That morning there was a slight breeze, which had encouraged a fishing party to take a catboat outside in the hope of bluefish. After they had made an offing of ten miles, the breeze dropped, and they lay becalmed all day. A current, meanwhile, bore them northward and eastward.

Toward sunset they saw something floating on the water, which they gradually overtook. It was the dead body of a young man. They got it on board, and the evening breeze brought them back to shore.

"It's unusual that it should be floating so soon after death," remarked the doctor, after other things had been said. "Must have been air in the lungs."

"It was that seaweed that drowned him," said the uncle. "He got tangled up in it. Why, over at Miami last summer he swam twenty miles, and come ashore as fresh as paint; but that seaweed is the devil!" After a pause he added: "Well, the poor boy is clear of that girl, anyway; but I'd rather she'd got him than—this!"

On the following morning the newspaper printed a paragraph of Eastern news. A girl—a professional swimmer and diver, and a champion in her class—had swum out to sea, alone, from Atlantic City, and had never returned. As she was perfectly at home in the water, it was conjectured that she must have met with some accident. The body had not been recovered. It had probably been carried far out to sea by some ocean current. Friends said that she had lately appeared depressed in spirits, from no ascertained cause.

"I guess that must have been she," said the uncle, letting fall the paper, which the doctor had handed him after reading the item.

"Three thousand miles apart, and they died about the same time!" rejoined the other. "We sometimes murder our children just by meddling too much in their private affairs. Well, all things mortal have their term; but the spirit—what do we know of the spirit?"

He took off his dimmed spectacles and wiped them. His friend sat silent, gnawing his gray mustache.

THOUGHT

I HOLD to this with firm intent—
That only thought is permanent.
Babel is naught, and yet I see
A tower that soars majestically;
And what save dreams to brood upon
Are the high walls of Babylon?
And what is Alexander? What
The knights and dames of Camelot?
Yet all survive through magic, wrought
Out of the crucible of thought.

Sennett Stephens

The Worst Joke in the World

A STORY WHICH THROWS A NEW AND INTERESTING LIGHT UPON THE TIME-HONORED PROBLEM OF THE MOTHER-IN-LAW

By Elisabeth Sanxay Holding

MRS. CHAMPNEY was putting the very last things into her bag, and Mrs. Maxwell and Mrs. Deane sat watching her. The room in which she had lived for nearly four years was already strange and unfamiliar. The silver toilet articles were gone from the bureau. The cupboard door stood open, showing empty hooks and shelves. The little water colors of Italian scenes had vanished from the walls, and the books from the table. All those things were gone which had so charmed and interested Mrs. Maxwell and Mrs. Deane.

They were old ladies, and to them Jessica Champney at fifty was not old at all. With her gayety, her lively interest in life, and her dainty clothes, she seemed to them altogether young—girlish, even, in her enthusiastic moments, and always interesting. They loved and admired her, and were heavy-hearted at her going.

"You've forgotten the pussy cat, Jessica," Mrs. Maxwell gravely remarked.

"Oh, so I have!" said Mrs. Champney.

Hanging beside the bureau was a black velvet kitten with a strip of sandpaper fastened across its back, and underneath it the inscription:

SCRATCH MY BACK

It was intended, of course, for striking matches. As Mrs. Champney never had occasion to strike a match, this little object was not remarkably useful. Nor, being a woman of taste, would she have admitted that it was in the least ornamental; but it was precious to her—so precious that a sob rose in her throat as she took it down from the wall.

She showed a bright enough face to the old ladies, however, as she carried the kitten across the room and laid it in the bag. She had often talked to these old friends about her past—about her two heavenly winters in Italy, about her girlhood "down East," about all sorts of lively and amusing things that she had seen and done; but she had said very, very little about the period to which the velvet kitten belonged.

It had been given to her in the early days of her married life by a grateful and adoring cook. It had hung on the wall of her bedroom in that shabby, sunny old house in Connecticut where her three children had been born. She could not think of that room unmoved, and she did not care to talk of it to any one.

Not that it was sad to remember those bygone days. There was no trace of bitterness in the memory. It was all tender and beautiful, and sometimes she recalled things that made her laugh through the tears; but even those things she couldn't talk about.

There was, for instance, that ridiculous morning when grandpa had come to see the baby, the unique and miraculous first baby. He had sat down in a chair and very gingerly taken the small bundle in his arms, and the chair had suddenly broken beneath his portly form. Down he crashed, his blue eyes staring wildly, his great white mustache fairly bristling with horror, the invaluable infant held aloft in both hands. If she had begun to tell about that, in the very middle of it another memory might have come—a recollection of the day when she had sat in that same room, the door locked, her hands tightly clasped, her eyes staring ahead of her at the years that must be lived without her husband, her friend and lover.

She had thought she could not bear that,

but she had borne it; and the time had come when the memory of her husband was no longer an anguish and a futile regret, but a benediction. She had lived a happy life with her children. They were all married now, and in homes of their own, and she was glad that it should be so.

These four years alone had been happy, too. Her children wrote to her and visited her, and their family affairs were a source of endless interest. She had all sorts of other interests, too. She made friends readily; she was an energetic parish worker; she loved to read; she enjoyed a matinée now and then, or a concert, and the conversation of Mrs. Maxwell and Mrs. Deane.

With all her heart she had relished her freedom and her dignity. Her children were always asking her to come and live with one or the other of them, but she had always affectionately refused. She believed it wasn't wise and wasn't right.

She had stayed on in this comfortable, old-fashioned boarding house in Stamford, cheerful and busy. It had been a delight beyond measure to her to send a little check now and then to one of her children, a present to a grandchild, some pretty thing that she had embroidered or crocheted to her daughters-in-law. Her elder son's wife had written once that she was a "real fairy godmother," and Mrs. Champney never forgot that. It was exactly what she wanted to be to them all—a gay, sympathetic, gracious fairy godmother.

But she wasn't going to be one any longer. What her lawyer called a "totally unforeseen contingency" had arisen, and all her life was changed. He was a young man, that lawyer. His father had been Mrs. Champney's lawyer and friend in his day, and she had, almost as a matter of course, given the son charge of her affairs when the elder man died.

She had not wanted either of her sons to look after things for her. She didn't like even to mention financial matters to people she loved. Indeed, she had been a little obstinate about this. And now this "totally unforeseen contingency" had come, to sweep away almost all of her income, and with it the independence, the dignity, that were to her the very breath of life.

If it had been possible, she would not have told her children. She had said nothing when she had received that letter from the lawyer—such an absurd and pitiful letter, full of a sort of angry resentment, as if she had been unjustly reproaching him. She had gone to see him at once. She had been very quiet, very patient with him, and had asked very few questions about what had happened. She simply wanted to know exactly what there was left for her, and she learned that she would have fifteen dollars a month.

So she had been obliged to write to her children, and they had all wanted her immediately; but she chose her second son, because he lived nearest, and she hadn't enough money for a longer journey. Now she was ready to go to his house.

She locked the bag and gave one more glance around the empty room.

"Well!" she said cheerfully. "That seems to be all!"

Mrs. Maxwell rose heavily from her chair.

"Jessica," she said, not very steadily, "we're going to miss you!"

Mrs. Deane also rose.

"Whoever else takes this room," she added sternly, "it won't be *you*—and I don't care what any one says, either!"

Mrs. Champney put an arm about each of them and smiled at them affectionately. She was, in their old eyes, quite a young woman, full of energy and courage, trim and smart in her dark suit and her debonair little hat; but she had never before felt so terribly old and discouraged.

She couldn't even tell these dear old friends that she would see them again soon, for in order to see them she would have either to get the money for the railway ticket from her son, or else to invite them to her daughter-in-law's house. It hurt her to leave them like this—and it was only the beginning.

At this point the landlady came toiling up the stairs.

"The taxi's here, Mrs. Champney," she said, with a sigh. "My, how empty the room does look!"

So Mrs. Champney kissed the old ladies and went downstairs. The two servants were waiting in the hall to say good-by to her. She smiled at them. Then the landlady opened the front door, and Mrs. Champney went out of the house, still smiling, went down the steps, and got into the taxi.

She sat up very straight in the cab, a valiant little figure, dressed in her best shoes, with spotless white gloves, and her

precious sable stole about her shoulders—and such pain and dread in her heart! There was no one in the world who could quite understand what she felt in this hour. To other people she was simply leaving a boarding house where she had lived all by herself, and going to a good home where she was heartily welcome, to a son whom she loved, a daughter-in-law of whom she was very fond, and a grandchild who was almost the very best of all her grandchildren; but to Mrs. Champney the journey was bitter almost beyond endurance.

She loved her children with all the strength of her soul, but she had been wise in her love. She had tried always to be a little aloof from them, never to be too familiar, never to be tiresome. She had given them all she had, all her love and care and sympathy, and she had wanted nothing in return. She wished them to think of her, not as weak and helpless, but as strong and enduring, and always ready to give. And now—

"Now I'm going to be a mother-in-law," she said to herself. "Oh, please God, help me! Help me not to be a burden to Molly and Robert! Help me to stand aside and to hold my tongue! Oh, please God, help me *not* to be a mother-in-law!"

II

Mrs. Champney had arranged matters so as to reach the house just at dinner time. She even hoped that she might be a little late, so that there wouldn't be any time at all to sit down and talk. She had never dreaded anything as she dreaded that first moment, the crossing of that threshold. Her hands and feet were like ice, her thin cheeks were flushed, anticipating it. She wanted to enter in an agreeable little stir and bustle, to be cheerful, to be casual; but Robert and Molly were too young for that. They would be too cordial.

"I don't expect them to want me," said Mrs. Champney to herself. "They can't want me. If they'd only just not try—not pretend!"

She did not know Molly very well. She had seen her a good many times—Molly and the incomparable baby—but that had been in the days when Mrs. Champney was a fairy godmother, with all sorts of delightful gifts to bestow. Robert's wife had been a little shy with her. A kind, honest girl, Mrs. Champney had thought her, good to look at in her splendid health and vitality, but not very interesting. And now she had to come into poor Molly's house!

She was pleased to see that her train was late. She had not told them what train she would take. Perhaps they wouldn't keep dinner waiting. When she got there, perhaps they would be sitting at the table. Then she could hurry in, full of cheerful apologies, and sit down with them, and there wouldn't be that strained, terrible moment she so much dreaded.

A vain hope! For, as she got out of the train, her heart sank to see Robert there waiting for her—Robert with his glummest face, Robert at his worst.

There was no denying that Robert had a worst. He was never willful and provoking, as his adorable sister could be upon occasion. He was never stormy and unreasonable, like his elder brother; but he could be what Mrs. Champney privately called "heavy," and that was, for her, one of the most dismaying things any one could be. She saw at the first glance that he was going to be heavy now.

"Mother!" he said, in a tone almost tragic.

"But, my dear boy, how in the world did you know I'd get this train?" she asked gayly. "I didn't write—"

"I've been waiting for an hour," he answered. "You said 'about dinner time,' and I certainly wasn't going to let you come from the station alone. This way—there's a taxi waiting."

Mrs. Champney was ashamed of herself. Robert was the dearest boy, so stalwart, so trustworthy, so handsome in his dark and somber fashion, and so touchingly devoted to her! After all, wasn't it far better to be a little too heavy than too light and insubstantial? As he got into the cab beside her, she slipped her arm through his and squeezed it.

"You dear boy, to wait like that!" she said.

"Mother!" he said again. "By Heaven, I could wring that fellow's neck! Speculating with your money—"

"Don't take it like that, Robert. It's all over and done with now."

"No, it's not!" said he. "It's — the thing is, you've been used to all sorts of little—little comforts and so on; and just at the present time I'm not able to give you—"

"Please don't, Robert!" she cried. "It hurts me!"

He put his arm about her shoulders.

"You're not going to be hurt," he said grimly; "not by *any one*, mother!"

His tone and his words filled her with dismay.

"Robert," she said firmly, "I will not be made a martyr of!"

"A victim, then," Robert insisted doggedly. "You've been tricked and swindled by that contemptible fellow; but Frank and I are going to see that it's made right!"

"Oh, Robert! You're not going to do anything to that poor, miserable, distracted man?"

"Nothing we can do. You gave the fellow a free hand, and he took advantage of it. No, I mean that Frank and I are going to make it up to you, mother."

He might as well have added "at any cost." Mrs. Champney winced in spirit, but at the same time she loved him for his blundering tenderness, his uncomprehending loyalty. He meant only to reassure her, but he made it all so hard, so terribly hard! She felt tears well up in her eyes. How could she go through with this gallantly if he made it so hard?

Then, suddenly, there came to her mind the memory of a winter afternoon, long, long ago, when Frank and Robert had been going out to skate. She had heard alarming reports about the ice, and she had run after them, bareheaded, into the garden. She could see that dear garden, bare and brown in the wintry sunshine; she could see her two boys, stopping and turning toward her as she called.

Frank had laughingly assured her that there was no danger at all. That was Frank's way. She didn't believe him, yet his sublime confidence in himself and his inevitable good luck somehow comforted her; and then Robert had said:

"Well, look here, mother—we'll promise not to go near the middle of the pond at the same time. Then, whatever happens, you'll have one of us left anyhow—see?"

And that was Robert's way. The very thought of it stopped the dreaded invasion of tears and made her smile to herself in the dark. Such a splendidly honest way—and so devastating!

The taxi had stopped now, and Robert helped her out in a manner that made her feel very, very old and frail.

"Wait till I pay the driver, mother," he said. "Don't try to go alone—it's too dark."

So Mrs. Champney waited in the dark road outside that strange little house. Her son was paying for the cab; her son was going to assist her up the path; she was old and helpless and dependent.

Then the front door opened, and Molly stood there against the light.

"Hello, mother dear!" she called, in that big, rich, beautiful voice of hers. "Hurry in! It's cold!"

Mrs. Champney did hurry in, and Molly caught her in both arms and hugged her tight.

"Just don't mind very much how things are, will you?" she whispered. "My housekeeping's pretty awful, you know!"

Tears came to Mrs. Champney's eyes again, because this was such a blessed sort of welcome.

"As if I'd care!" she said.

"Let me show your room—and Bobbetty," said Molly.

She took the bag from Robert, who had just come in, and ran up the stairs. Mrs. Champney followed her. All the little house seemed warm and bright with Molly's beautiful, careless spirit. It wasn't strange or awkward. It was like coming home; and the room that Molly had got ready for her was so pretty!

"Dinner's all ready," said Molly; "but—if you'll just take one look at Bobbetty. He's—when he's asleep, he's—"

Words failed her.

Mrs. Champney got herself ready as quickly as she could, and followed Molly down the hall to a closed door. Molly turned the handle softly, and they stepped into a little room that was like another world, all dark and still, with the wind blowing in at an open window.

"Nothing wakes him up!" whispered Molly proudly, and turned on a green-shaded electric lamp that stood on the bureau.

Mrs. Champney went over to the crib and looked down at the child who lay there—the child who was her child, flesh of her flesh, and was yet another woman's child. He was beautiful—more beautiful than any of her children had been. He lay there like a little prince. His face, olive-skinned and warmly flushed on the cheeks, wore a look of careless arrogance, his dark brows were level and haughty, his mouth was richly scornful; and yet, for all this pride of beauty, she could not help seeing the baby softness and innocence and helplessness of him.

He might lie there like a little prince, but he was caged in an iron crib, he wore faded old flannel pyjamas, and beside him, where it had slipped from the hand that still grasped it in dreams, lay such an unprincely toy! Mrs. Champney, bending over to examine it, found it to be a rubber ball squeezed into a white sock.

It seemed to Mrs. Champney that she could never tire of looking at that beautiful baby. She hadn't half finished when Molly touched her arm and whispered " Robert," and, turning out the light, led her husband's mother across the dark, windy room out into the hall again.

" I heard Robert getting restless downstairs," she explained.

Side by side they descended the stairs. Mrs. Champney was happy, with that particular happiness which the companionship of babies brought to her. She had friends who were made unhappy by the sight of babies. They said that they couldn't help looking ahead and imagining the sorrows in store for the poor little things. But to Mrs. Champney this seemed morbid and quite stupid, because, when the sorrows came, the babies would no longer be babies, but grown people, and as well able as any one else to deal with them.

No—babies were not melancholy objects to Mrs. Champney. On the contrary, they filled her with a strong and tender delight, because of her knowledge that whatever troubles came to them, she could surely help; because, for babies, a kiss is a cure for so much, and a song can dry so many baby tears; because love, which must so often stand mute and helpless before grown-up misery, can work such marvels for little children.

She was happy, then, until she reached the foot of the stairs—and not again for a long time.

Robert was waiting for them there. He came forward, with a faint frown, and pushed into place two hairpins that were slipping out of Molly's hair. It was the most trifling action, yet it seemed to Mrs. Champney very significant. He didn't like to see those hairpins falling out, didn't like to see Molly's lovely, shining hair in disorder. He noticed things of that sort, and he cared. He cared too much. There had been a look of annoyance and displeasure on his face that distressed Mrs. Champney.

Fussiness, she thought, was one of the most deplorable traits a man could have. It was only another name for pettiness, and that was something no member of her family had ever displayed. Could it be possible that Robert, the most uncompromising and high-minded of all her children, was developing in that way—and with such a wife as Molly?

She watched her son with growing uneasiness during the course of the dinner. It was a splendidly cooked dinner. The roast veal was browned and seasoned to perfection, the mashed potatoes were smooth and light, there were scalloped tomatoes and a salad of apples and celery, and a truly admirable lemon meringue pie; but Robert frowned because the potatoes were in an earthenware bowl, and the plates did not match. When the splendid pie appeared, in the tin dish in which it had been baked, he sprang up and carried it out into the kitchen, to return with it damaged, but lying properly on a respectable dish.

" Oh, I'm awfully sorry, Robert!" Molly said, each time that Robert found something wrong; and there was such generous contrition in her honest face that Mrs. Champney wanted to get up and shake her son.

What did those silly little things matter? How could he even see them, with Molly before his eyes?

" She's beautiful," thought Mrs. Champney. " She wouldn't be beautiful in a photograph. I suppose she'd look quite plain; but when you're with her—when she smiles—it's like a blessing!"

III

It was not a comfortable meal for any of them, and Mrs. Champney was glad when it was finished. She offered to help Molly with the dishes, and she really wanted to do so; but when Molly refused, and she saw that Robert didn't like the idea, she did not persist. She went into the little sitting room with Robert, and he settled her in an armchair, putting behind her shoulders a plump cushion that made her neck ache. He lit his pipe and began to move about restlessly.

" You know," he began abruptly, " Molly's not really—slovenly."

" Robert!" cried Mrs. Champney. " What nonsense!"

" Yes, I know," he said doggedly; " but I don't want you to think—"

Mrs. Champney did not hear the rest of

his speech. She was vaguely aware that he was making excuses for Molly, but she did not stop him. He had said enough. He had given her the key, and now she could understand.

This was not pettiness, and Robert was not fussy. It was because he loved Molly so much that he could not endure to have another person see in her what might be construed as faults. If he had been alone with Molly, he wouldn't have cared, he wouldn't even have noticed these things. It was because his mother had come, and he was afraid.

It is an old and a deep-rooted thing, the child's faith in the mother's judgment. If the mother has been honest and wise, if the child has been never deceived or disappointed by her, then, no matter how old he grows, or how far he may go from her, that old and deep-rooted faith lives in him. Robert, at twenty-six, was surer of himself than he was ever likely to be again. He was certain that all his ideas were his own, and that no living creature could influence him; yet he was terribly afraid of what his mother might think of Molly.

For, after all, his mother was the standard, and the home she had made for him in his boyhood must forever be the standard of homes. She would see that this home of Molly's was not like that. She would think—

"You needn't worry, my dear boy," said Mrs. Champney gently. "I'm sure I'll understand Molly."

And no more than that. It wouldn't do to tell him what she really thought of Molly. It would sound exaggerated and insincere. It would startle him, and it might conceivably make him contrary; so she held her tongue.

Presently Molly came in from the kitchen, flushed and smiling, and sank into a chair.

"Take off that apron, old girl," said Robert.

"Oh, I'm sorry!" said Molly. "I always forget!"

Robert took it away into the kitchen.

"Too tired for a song, Molly?" he asked when he returned.

"Of course I'm not!" said she, getting up again.

She was tired, though, and a little nervous, and Mrs. Champney felt sorry for her; but Robert would have it so. His mother must see what Molly could do. He lay back in his chair, smoking, with an air of regal indifference, as if he were a young sultan who had commanded this performance but was not much interested in it; but as a matter of fact he was twice as nervous as Molly.

He had spoken to his mother before about Molly's singing, and Mrs. Champney had thought of it as an agreeable accomplishment for a son's wife, but this performance amazed her. This was not a parlor accomplishment, this big, glorious voice, true and clear, effortless because so perfectly managed. This was an art, and Molly was an artist.

"Molly!" she cried, when the song was done. "Molly, my dear! I don't know what to say!"

Molly flushed with pleasure.

"I do love music," she said. "I often hope Bobbetty will care about it."

"That was a darned silly song, though," observed Robert.

Molly turned away hastily.

"I know it was!" she said cheerfully.

But Mrs. Champney had seen the tears come into her eyes. Molly was hurt. She didn't understand, and unfortunately Mrs. Champney did. She knew that Robert had been trying to tell his mother that Molly could do even better than this—that she could, if she chose, sing the most prodigious songs. He was afraid that his mother would judge and condemn Molly for that darned silly song about "the flowers all nodding on yonder hill."

"That's what being a mother-in-law really means," said Mrs. Champney to herself. "It means being the third person, the one who stands outside and sees everything—all the poor, pitiful little faults and weaknesses. Love won't help. The more I love them, the more I can't help seeing, and they'll know—they'll always know. When Robert is impatient, Molly will know that I've noticed it, and she'll think she has to notice it, too. When Molly is careless, Robert will imagine that I'm blaming her, and he'll feel ashamed of her. That's why mothers-in-law make trouble. It's not because they always interfere, or because they're troublesome and domineering. It's because they *see* all the little things that nobody ought to see—the little things that would never grow important if a third person wasn't there. I used to feel so sorry for mothers-in-law. I used to think it was a vulgar, heartless joke about

their making trouble. A joke? Oh, it's the worst, most horrible joke in the world —because it's *true!*"

IV

Mrs. Champney did not sleep well that night. When she first turned out the light, a strange sort of panic seized her. She felt trapped, shut in, here in this unfamiliar room, in this house where she had no business to be, and yet could not leave. She got up and turned on the light, and that was better, for she could think more clearly in the light. She propped herself up on the pillows, pulled the blanket up to her chin, and sat there, trying to find the way out.

"There always is a way out," she thought. "It's never necessary to do a thing that injures other people. I must not stay here, or with any of my children. If I think quietly and sensibly, I can—"

There was a knock at the door.

"Are you all right, mother?" asked Robert's voice. "I saw your light."

"Perfectly all right, dear boy!" she answered brightly. "I'm very comfortable. Good night!"

"Sure?" he asked.

She wanted to jump up and go to him and kiss him—her dear, solemn, anxious Robert; but that wouldn't do. Never, never, while she had a trace of dignity and honor, would she turn to her children for reassurance. She was the mother. She could not always be strong, but she could at least hide her weakness from her children. She could endure her bad moments alone.

"Quite sure!" she answered, and snapped out the light. "There! I'm going to sleep! Good night, my own dear, dear boy!"

"Good night, mother!" he answered.

His voice touched her so! If only she could let go, and be frail and helpless, and allow her children to take care of her! They would be so glad to do it—they would be so dear and kind!

"Shame on you, Jessica Champney!" she said to herself. "You weren't an old lady before you came here, and you're not going to be one now. You're only fifty, and you're well and strong. There must be any number of things a healthy woman of fifty can do. Find them!"

And then, as if by inspiration, she thought of Emily Lyons.

The next morning, as soon as Robert had gone, she told Molly that she wanted to "see about something"; and off she went, dressed in her best again, and took the train to a near-by town. She was going to see Miss Lyons. She had not met this old school friend for a good many years, but she remembered her with affection and respect, and perhaps with a little pity, because Emily had never married. She had devoted her life to charitable work — an admirable existence, but, Mrs. Champney thought, rather a forlorn one.

Her pity fled in haste, however, when she saw Emily.

A very earnest young secretary ushered the caller into a big, quiet, sunny office, and there, behind a large desk, sat Miss Lyons. She rose at once, and came forward with outstretched hands. Her blue eyes behind the horn-rimmed spectacles were as friendly and kind as ever, and yet Mrs. Champney's heart sank. The Emily she wished to remember was a thin, freckled girl with a long blond pigtail and a shy and hesitating manner—an Emily who had very much looked up to the debonair and popular Jessica. This was such a very different Emily—a person of importance, of grave assurance, a person with a large, impressive office at her command. To save her life Mrs. Champney couldn't help being impressed by offices and filing cabinets and typewriters.

She sat down, and she tried to talk in her usual blithe and amusing way, but she knew that she was not succeeding at all. In the presence of this new Emily she felt shockingly frivolous. She was sorry that she had worn her white gloves and her sable stole. She wished that the heels of her new shoes were not so high.

She told Emily that she wanted something to do.

"Do you mean charitable work, Jessica?" asked Miss Lyons.

"I'm afraid I'd have to be paid," said Mrs. Champney, with a guilty flush. "You see, Emily, I've had a—a financial disaster. Of course, my children are only too willing, but—"

"They're all married, aren't they?" asked Emily.

Something in the grave, kindly tone of her question stung Mrs. Champney into a sort of bitterness.

"Yes," she answered. "All of them are married. I'm a mother-in-law, Emily."

Miss Lyons did not smile. She was si-

lent for a time, looking down at her polished desk as if she were consulting a crystal. Then she looked up.

"We happen to need somebody in the Needlecraft Shop," she said. "I could give you that, Jessica, at eighteen dollars a week; but—"

"But what?" asked Mrs. Champney, after waiting a minute.

"I'm afraid you haven't had much experience," said Miss Lyons.

"I've done a good deal of parish work," said Mrs. Champney anxiously.

She had known love, and happiness with the man she loved. She had endured the anguish of losing him. She had borne three children and brought them up. She had traveled a little in the world. She had even known a "financial disaster" at fifty; but in the presence of Emily Lyons she was ready to admit that she had had no experience—that her sole qualification for any useful occupation was the parish work she had done.

"If you'd like to try it, then," said Emily gently. "I've found, though, that women who have led a sheltered domestic life are inclined to be a little oversensitive when it comes to business."

Mrs. Champney, into whose sheltered domestic life had come only such incidents as birth and death and illness and accident and so on, said that she hoped she wasn't silly.

"Of course you're not, my dear!" said her old friend, taking her hand across the desk. "You're splendid! You always were!"

And Mrs. Champney had to be satisfied with that. She was to begin at the Needlecraft Shop the next morning. She was at last to enter the world; but instead of being filled with ambitious hopes and resolves, she actually could think of nothing but how she was to tell Robert about it.

The only possible way was to take a mighty high hand with him from the start, and the trouble was that she didn't feel high-handed. She felt depressed, and tired and—yes, crushed—that was the word for it. She was not going to let Robert suspect that, however, or Molly, either.

She decided to take her time about getting back. After leaving Emily, she walked for a time through the streets of the brisk suburban town. Then, seeing a clean little white-tiled restaurant, she went in there and had her lunch. It was noon, and there were a good many other business women there. Mrs. Champney tried to feel that she was one of them now, but somehow she could not. Somehow the whole thing seemed unreal, and even a little fantastic.

She mustn't think that it was unreal or fantastic, or how could she convince Robert? She tried to make it real by doing all sorts of calculations based upon eighteen dollars a week. With that amount, and with what was left of her income, she could manage to live by herself, somewhere near Robert and Molly, where she could see them and the baby often, and yet be independent. Once more she could be a fairy godmother—with sadly clipped wings, to be sure, but still able to bestow a little gift now and then.

She thought she would get something for Bobbetty now, and she bought one of the nicest gray plush animals imaginable. The saleswoman said it was a cat, but Mrs. Champney privately believed it to be a dog, because of its drooping ears. Anyhow, it was a lovable animal, with a frank and kindly expression and a most becoming leather collar. On the train, going back, she regretfully took out its round yellow eyes, for they were pins, and unless she forestalled him, Bobbetty would surely do this.

Even then it was a lovable animal, and Bobbetty received it with warm affection. He was sitting in his high chair in the kitchen, while Molly cooked the dinner. He was almost austerely neat and clean after his bath, and he was eating a bowl of Graham crackers and milk, with a large bib tied under his chin. A model child—yet, in the sidelong glance of his black eyes in the direction of the new bowwow, who was not to be touched until supper was finished, Mrs. Champney saw a thoughtful and alarming gleam. Bobbetty was not quite sure whether he would continue being good, or whether it would be nicer suddenly and violently to demand the bowwow.

Mrs. Champney helped him to choose the better course. She entertained him while he ate, and then carried him off upstairs, with the bowwow, and put him to bed. He became very garrulous then. He lay in his crib, clasping the bow-wow, and he told Mrs. Champney all sorts of interesting things in such a polite, conversational tone that she felt quite ashamed of herself for interrupting him and telling him to go to sleep.

He was nice about it, however. He paid no attention to this rudeness, but pleasantly went on talking. Even when she went out of the room and closed the door behind her, she heard his bland little voice continuing the story of a wild horsy who stampled on *six* policemens. Bobbetty was not yet three, but he had personality.

She was smiling as she went down the stairs—until she saw Robert. He came to the foot of the stairs, watching her as she came toward him. She had to meet his eyes, she had to smile again, but it was hard beyond all measure.

She had never seen that look on his face before. He had always been utterly loyal to her, had always loved her, but it had been after the fashion of a boy. The look she saw on his face now was not a boy's; it was the profound compassion and tenderness of a man. It came to her, with a stab of pain, that she had cruelly underrated her son. She had thought of him as a dear and rather clumsy boy, and he was so much more than that—so much more!

Her own affair seemed more fantastic than ever now. Here was Robert, making his valiant battle in the world for the life and safety of his wife and child. Here was Molly, busy with the vital needs of life, with food and clothes, with the care of their child; and she herself was going to work in the Needlecraft Shop.

She had to tell them, of course. When they were all seated at the table, she did so, in the most casual, matter-of-fact way.

It was even worse than she had feared. Robert grew very white.

"You mean—a job?" he asked.

"It's charitable work, really," Mrs. Champney explained. "The foreign-born women bring their needlework to the shop, and we sell it on commission for them. The idea is to encourage their home industries, and—"

"But you're going to get paid for it?" asked Robert.

"Why, yes!" said Mrs. Champney brightly. "I'm sure I'll enjoy the work, too. I've always—"

"You mean you're going off to work every morning in this shop?" said Robert. "Do you mind telling me why?"

"Because I consider it very useful and interesting work, Robert," replied Mrs. Champney, with dignity.

There was a long silence.

"All right!" said Robert briefly.

She knew how terribly she had hurt him. He had wanted to do so much for her, to take her into his home and protect her and care for her, and she would not let him. She had turned away with a smile from all that he had to offer. She would take nothing.

"I've always led—such an active life," she said, in a very unsteady voice. "I should think you could understand, Robert—"

"I do!" he said grimly.

"You don't!" she cried. "You don't! You—"

She could not go on. She bent her head and pretended to be cutting up something on her plate, but she could not see clearly. He never would understand that she was doing this only for love of him, only so that she might not be here in his home as the sinister third person who saw everything and—

She started at the touch of Molly's hand on her arm.

"If that's your way to be happy, darling," said Robert's wife, and Mrs. Champney saw tears in her honest eyes.

V

MRS. CHAMPNEY envisaged her life as divided into epochs, each one with its own significance and its own memories. There was her childhood, there was her girlhood. There were the early days of her married life, when she and her husband had been alone. There were the crowded and anxious and wonderful years when her children had been little. There was the beginning of her widowhood, overshadowed with anguish and loneliness, yet with a dark beauty of its own. There was her tranquil middle age, and there was her business life.

She had begun it on Tuesday, and this was Friday. It had lasted four days, yet it seemed to her quite as long as all the years of her youth. It seemed a lifetime in itself, in which she had acquired a new and bitter wisdom.

The train stopped at her station, and, with a crowd of other home-going commuters, Mrs. Champney got out and hurried up the steps to the street, to catch a trolley car; but she was not quick enough. By the time she got there the car was full, and she drew back and let it go. She never was quick enough any more. She seemed to have been transferred into a world of terrific speed and vigor, where she was

hopelessly outdistanced, hopelessly old and weary and slow.

She had thought, until this week, that she was a fairly intelligent and energetic woman. She had even had her innocent little vanities; but now, standing on the corner and looking after the car—

"I'm a silly, doddering old thing!" she said to herself, with a trembling lip.

She remembered all the dreadful defeats and humiliations of the week. She remembered how slow she had been about wrapping up things and making change—how curt she had been with some of the wealthiest and most important customers—how stupid she had been about understanding the Polish and Italian women who brought in their work. She remembered the weary patience of Miss Elliott, who managed the shop. Miss Elliott was not more than twenty-eight, but she had been to Mrs. Champney like a discouraged but long-suffering teacher with a very trying child.

"Doddering!" Mrs. Champney repeated.

She was alone on the corner. In this new world nobody waited for anything. Those who, like herself, had missed the car, had at once set off on foot; and Mrs. Champney decided to do so herself. It was less than a mile—a pleasant walk in the soft April dusk.

This walk might have been specially designed by Miss Elliott to teach Mrs. Champney another lesson; only it was a lesson that she had already learned. She really needed no further demonstration of the fact that she was fifty, and utterly tired and miserable. It was superfluous, it was cruel, and it made her angry. When she reached the street where Robert's little house stood, her heart was hot and bitter with resentment.

"If they'd only let me alone!" she thought. "I don't want any one to speak to me or look at me. I know I'm unreasonable. I want to be unreasonable. I want to be let alone!"

But of course she couldn't be. Nobody can be let alone except those who would give all the world for a little tiresome interference. Molly saw at once how tired she was, and wanted her to lie down and have dinner brought up to her. Robert, by saying nothing at all, was still more difficult to endure.

"I'm not particularly tired, Molly, thank you," said Mrs. Champney, with great politeness.

What she wanted to do was to stamp her foot and cry:

"Let me alone! Let me alone! Tomorrow is Saturday, and the next day is Sunday. You can talk to me on Sunday. Let me alone now!"

She sternly repressed all this. She sat down at the table and tried to eat her dinner. She forced herself to remain in the sitting room until ten o'clock.

"In a week or two I'll go away and get a room for myself," she thought, "where I can be as tired as I like!"

When the clock struck ten, she sat still and counted up to five hundred, so that she wouldn't seem like a tired person in a dreadful hurry to get to bed. Then she rose, said good night to Robert and Molly, and went upstairs.

Even then she would not slight or omit any detail of her routine. She washed, rubbed cold cream into her hands, braided her hair, folded her clothes neatly, ready for the morning, and knelt down to say her prayers. Then she turned out the light, opened the window, and got into bed; and she was so glad to be there, so glad to lay her tired gray head on the pillow, that she cried.

She was ashamed of this weakness, and meant to struggle against it; but sleep came before she had driven it away — a heavy and sorrowful sleep, colored with the mist of tears.

She slept. Then she sighed, and stirred in her sleep. Something was coming through into the shadowy world of dreams —something imperious and menacing. She didn't want to wake up, but something was forcing her to do so. She heard something calling.

She sat up suddenly. It was a child's voice calling "Mother!"—a sound which would, she thought, have reached her even in heaven.

"Mother! Mother! I *want* you!" It was Bobbetty screaming that, and no one answered him. "I want you, mother!"

"What's the matter with Molly?" thought Mrs. Champney in a blaze of anger.

She got out of bed and hurried barefooted across the room. That baby voice was filling the whole house, the whole world, with its heartbreaking cry:

"Mother! Mother!"

Mrs. Champney went out into the hall, and there she found Robert and Molly

standing in the dim light outside Bobbetty's door—Molly with her magnificent hair hanging loose about her shoulders, her face quite desperate, tears rolling down her cheeks.

"What's the matter?" cried Mrs. Champney.

"Hush!" whispered Robert. "Dr. Pinney said we weren't to take him up—said it was nothing but temper. I went in to see, and he's perfectly all right. He simply wants Molly to take him up."

"But he's—so little!" sobbed Molly, in a smothered voice.

"Mother! I want you, mother!" shrieked Bobbetty.

Molly made a move forward, but Robert clutched her arm. He, too, was pale and desperate.

"No, Molly!" he said. "Dr. Pinney told us definitely—"

"Bah!" cried Mrs. Champney, in a tone that amazed both of them. "Dr. Pinney, indeed!"

She opened the door of Bobbetty's room, went in, snatched him out of his crib, and carried him off, past his speechless parents, and into her own room.

VI

Bobbetty's hand was flung out and fell, soft and limp, across Mrs. Champney's face. She opened her eyes. The dawn was stealing into the room, coming like music. One drowsy little bird was awake in the world, piping sweetly. The breeze came, fluttering the window curtain, and it seemed to her that she could hear the footsteps of the glorious sun coming up the sky. All creation waited for him—waited breathless, to break into a great chorus of ecstasy when he appeared.

Bobbetty was waking, too. His hard little head bumped against her shoulder. His toes moved softly, he scowled, his great black eyes opened, he looked sternly into her face, and then he smiled.

"Gramma!" he said contentedly, and sat up.

"We must be very quiet, not to wake mother," said Mrs. Champney.

"Why?" asked Bobbetty.

In his superb arrogance he looked upon his mother somewhat as he looked upon the sun. She existed solely for him. He adored her and he needed her—that was why she existed. Mrs. Champney did not trouble to explain. He would learn soon enough how very many other people there were in this world, and that it was not his own world and his own sun at all. In the meantime, let him make the most of it. She said that they would surprise mother, and the idea appealed to Bobbetty. He said he would be as quiet as a mouse, and so he was.

Mrs. Champney got his ridiculous little garments and dressed him. She knelt at his feet to put on his stubby sandals. She even kissed his feet, and his hands, and his warm, olive-tinted cheeks, and the back of his neck. He smiled upon her, condescendingly but kindly.

Then she carried him down into the kitchen. He was a plump and sturdy baby, but he was no burden to her arms. She wasn't tired now. Indeed, she thought she had never in her life felt so gay and light and happy.

The sun had come, and the kitchen was filled with it. The aluminium saucepans glittered like silver, and the water ran out of the tap in a rainbow spray. She laid the table in the dining room, and Bobbetty followed her back and forth, carrying the less dangerous things.

There was a wonderful perfume in the air — the intangible sweetness of spring—and with it, and no less wonderful, was the homely fragrance of coffee and oatmeal and bacon. It was a divine hour, and Bobbetty knew it. Bobbetty could share it with her —he and he alone.

He dropped a loaf of bread that he was carrying, and, moved by impulse, kicked it across the room. Mrs. Champney picked it up, without a word of reproof. She knew how Bobbetty felt.

Then she drew the chairs up to the table —and made her great discovery.

"There are four chairs!" she cried aloud. "There are four of us! Why, I'm not the third person at all!"

She was so overcome by this that she sat down, and stared before her with a dazed look.

"There were three already—I'm the fourth, and four's such a nice number! I can't go away and leave Robert and Molly alone together. They'll never be alone together any more—there's Bobbetty. I can help so much! They're both so very, very young, and I could do so much! Molly could have time for music. There are two buttons off Bobbetty's underwaist. Mother-in-law, indeed!"

She heard the percolator boiling too hard, and she got up. In the kitchen doorway she met Bobbetty with the bowwow.

"Bobbetty!" she said. "Do you know something?"

"Yes, I do!" shouted the child.

But Mrs. Champney told him, anyhow.

"Bobbetty," she said, "there's a Lucy Stone League for women who don't want to use their husbands' names. I believe I'll start a Jessica Champney League for women who refuse to be called mothers-in-law. There's really no such thing as a mother-in-law, Bobbetty. It's just a joke, and a very nasty one. Really and truly, Bobbetty, there are nothing but mothers-in-nature. I think I'll invent some other word. Why not 'husbandsmother,' or 'wifesmother,' or—"

Molly appeared before her, evidently in great distress.

"Oh, mother darling!" she cried. "You shouldn't have done this! You shouldn't be up so early! You'll be tired out before you start!"

Mrs. Champney stirred the oatmeal, which was bubbling and spouting like molten lava.

"I don't believe I will go," she said. "It seems—such a waste of time. I think I'll stay home, and help you, and be a grandmother. I've tried everything else, and I believe I'd do well at that."

Molly stared for a moment. Then she ran to the foot of the stairs.

"Robert!" she called, in her ringing, joyous voice. "Robert! Mother's going to stay home!"

SYRINX

I DINED with Pan
  One evening on a roof;
Oh, yes, it was concealed,
  Of course—his hoof!

And he was irreproachably
  Attired—
By all the women obviously
  Admired.

He had a way with waiters;
  At his nod
They bowed and bent, as though
  Before a god.

We dined—but really I
  Have quite forgot,
Although the food was good,
  Upon just what.

We danced—he said mine was
  A wood nymph's grace;
He held me close—
  My face against his face.

The music wildly rang,
  The lights grew dim;
And then, and then—
  I ran away from him!

Yes, I am safe now,
  Very safe indeed;
But it is dull, oh, quite—
  To be a reed!

Roselle Mercier Montgomery

Noonie

A STORY OF THIRTY YEARS AGO IN THE NEW CANADIAN NORTHWEST

By Ginty Beynon

THIS happened in the nineties, when the white population, slowly seeping into western Canada from the eastern provinces, was not so much driving the Indian back as blotting him out.

In those days an adventurous branch of the railway had just nosed its way through a fertile country south of the main line, and had gone on to catch up with the larger centers of traffic at Brandon. Trotting after the railway came the villages—towns, they called themselves, scorning any meaner denomination, although each of them consisted of from fifty to one hundred clapboard shacks and houses standing, white and brown and red, on the prairie. They were naked of trees and shrubs, these little pioneer villages. In their raw, ugly newness they were a horrible disfigurement of the flower-studded reaches of grass that stretched out to the far horizon and beyond it.

One of the newest, rawest, and ugliest of these prairie towns was Souris River. It had just happened. Yesterday the wind was blowing over the sweet-smelling prairie grass, and to-day there was Souris River—a red railway station, Burns's general store, McDonald's livery stable, Barker's butcher shop, and the Graydon House, a cross between a boarding house and a hotel, and the center of such social life as the little town possessed.

The Indians neither resented nor resisted the intrusion of the new settlement. Rather, in their small way, they exploited it. Mrs. Graydon, hurrying to get dinner for her fifteen boarders, would hear a grunting at the door, and would look up to see a round, fat squaw, with a pack on her back, blocking out the sunlight. Having caught the landlady's attention, the squaw would grin widely and enter silently on her moccasined feet, letting her red handkerchief slip from her head as she sat down and opened her pack. In it would be sweet grass baskets, and gaudy bead necklaces, and moccasins of all sizes—men's moccasins, and women's, and moccasins for little feet like those of Agnes Graydon, or for her bigger sister Marie, both of whom, standing close beside their mother, looked on with sparkling eyes.

Another day it would be pails of wild strawberries that the Indians brought, or pin cherries, or blueberries, if it was later in the season. They were a queer nomadic folk, drifting aimlessly about the prairie in rattling wagons drawn by their tough, wild little ponies.

One day a small town of tepees would appear on the river bank, and on the next the village would be invaded by the venders of baskets and moccasins, while the Indian men brought ponies to sell to the farmers. Sometimes a squaw would offer herself to do housework. Strong, husky women as they were, they would have been a substantial help to the harassed womenfolk of the village if they had had any traditions of housewifery; but most of them knew no more about cleaning than a newborn babe.

Noonie was different. She appeared at the doorway of the Graydon House one summer day in a bright red calico skirt with white polka dots, and a white waist drawn tight over her ample bosom; and both garments were clean. When you think what that means, living in a tepee, and doing her washing in the river, you will realize how different Noonie was.

By an up and down motion of the arms she indicated that she wanted to do washing. Mrs. Graydon told her, somehow, that she was to come back the next morn-

ing, and she should have plenty of washing to do.

On her way out Noonie stopped to pat the head of little Agnes Graydon.

"Good papoose!" she said, and the child smiled at her, feeling an instinctive trust in the old Indian woman.

From that day Noonie became an institution in the Graydon family. She washed on Mondays, ironed on Tuesdays, cleaned on Thursdays. With the inevitable bandanna handkerchief pinned under her chin, she would silently appear at the door at eight o'clock on each of these mornings, a huge woman, weighing one hundred and ninety pounds, and as bronze in color as an autumn leaf.

As soon as she came in, she would look quickly about for little Agnes Graydon, would pat the child's curly head kindly, and would say:

"Good papoose!"

It soon became apparent that she adored the little girl. She would bring her baskets and moccasins and bead necklaces from the Indian camp. When Mrs. Graydon, wise mother that she was, insisted that these gifts should be shared with Marie, Noonie sulked.

On a day when Agnes and Marie would come running home from school with dirty pinafores, Noonie would take up a corner of the one that Agnes was wearing and say:

"*Machtitsu, machtitsu!*"—which, being translated, means "bad, bad."

Immediately she would whip a clean one out of the clothes basket and iron it for her favorite.

It was useless for Marie to point to hers and repeat:

"*Machtitsu, machtitsu!*"

Noonie would shake her head and answer the child:

"*Machtitsu nutchque*"—meaning "not bad."

Then, taking no further notice, she would go about her business.

Noonie was a good washer and ironer, and that summer she kept Agnes Graydon clothed immaculately, as no other child in the hustling little pioneer village was dressed. At first Mrs. Graydon tried to even up between her two children, but it proved too difficult to fight Noonie's stubborn devotion to the younger one, and she finally yielded a smiling assent.

One would be less than human who did not respond to so much devotion, and it became a matter of course that Agnes should save sticks of candy, and little stones, and flowers gathered on the prairie, for Noonie. The old Indian woman would take them and chuckle over them, and whether the gift was perishable or permanent she would do the same thing with it. She would go out to the back yard, find an empty plum or pear or tomato can, and put the gift into it, to be taken to her tepee. She never thought to wash the can out. There were curious lapses in Noonie's cleanliness.

And then one day Noonie did something which sent a shiver of terror over Agnes. The child was leaning both elbows on the washtub, laughing up into the squaw's face, when the old Indian woman suddenly leaned forward, touched her, made the sign which, in their talk, had come to mean Mrs. Graydon, pointed up, and muttered:

"Ma papoose!"

Her meaning was quite clear to Agnes. Noonie had said that when Mrs. Graydon died, she would take Agnes to be her papoose. The child took her elbows off the washtub, stepped back, and looked at the Indian woman in horror. She shook her head violently. The squaw only chuckled.

Agnes sought her mother.

"Noonie says she is going to take me to be her papoose when you die."

Mrs. Graydon put an affectionate hand on the girl's head.

"Don't worry, daughter. I don't expect to die for a long time yet."

And with that Agnes was satisfied for the time being. You know what a sieve for both trouble and happiness the child mind always is.

The next time the old squaw put her hand on her head and grunted, "Ma papoose," Agnes was quicker to take alarm. She darted swiftly away from under the Indian woman's hand, and did not come back for several hours.

Even this second alarm passed by, however, and she went on being friends with the old squaw, sometimes even carrying one of her precious cans part way home to the Indian encampment for her.

One evening Noonie persuaded the little girl to go all the way, and took her into her tent. She displayed every little gift that Agnes had given her, and for the first time in her life she kissed the child and said hungrily, "Ma papoose," with such a fierce light of possession in her eyes that Agnes backed out of the tent and took to

her heels. She came panting into the Graydon kitchen, where her mother was taking a pan of hot buns out of the oven.

"Mother, Noonie keeps talking about having me for her papoose. She frightens me," she said.

Her mother gently loosened the buns from the pan and slid them out upon a clean paper before she answered:

"Noonie can't have you for her papoose, little one. If she frightens you, keep away from her."

It was not so easy for a child to follow this advice, but Agnes thought of a way out. She would plague the old squaw until Noonie would stop loving her, and therefore stop wanting her. She would lean on the washtub and upset it over the floor and herself. She would walk over the wet floor with dirty boots when the Indian woman was scrubbing. She would deliberately dirty the clothes on the line.

All this she did, without altering in the least the old squaw's regard. At most Noonie would say a mild "*Machtitsu*," and repair the damage uncomplainingly.

II

And so the summer slipped away, and the wild aster took the place of the orange lily along the road allowance, and the distant hum of the binder was heard in the fields.

One day Noonie told Agnes that when the leaves fell the Indians would go away. She looked at the little girl with a strange light in her eyes, and the child, looking back at her, knew that she had resolved to take her away with the Indians.

She sought her mother out where she was darning stockings. She leaned against Mrs. Graydon, who slipped an arm about her.

"Well, little daughter?"

"Mother!"

"Yes, dear?"

"Noonie says the Indians are going away when the leaves fall."

Mrs. Graydon stretched a hole over her doubled fist before she answered:

"I shouldn't be surprised. We'll miss Noonie, won't we?"

"I won't."

"You should more than any one."

A long pause, while Mrs. Graydon filled the hole in.

"Mother!"

"Yes, dear?'

Another long pause.

"Mother!" again.

"What is it, dear?"

"Noonie means to take me away with her."

Mrs. Graydon put down the stocking and looked up.

"Did Noonie say that, dear?" she asked, aroused at last.

"No, mother."

"Then what makes you think it?"

"The queer way she looks at me," said the child.

Her mother smiled, relieved.

"You have a vivid imagination, Agnes—which is a good thing if you do not let it make you wretched. Noonie is not going to take you away."

Nevertheless, from that day forward there was almost open warfare against the squaw on the part of the child. She redoubled her efforts to alienate Noonie's affection; but in vain, for the squaw's patience was limitless.

So the autumn days dropped off the calendar one by one. A mellow September day wrapped in a thick yellow haze faded unexpectedly into a cool evening, which was yet colder at midnight. The farmers covered their cucumber and pumpkin vines, and some built fire guards around the late wheat, to keep off the frost.

The next morning there was a thin film of frost over everything, and within a week the banks of the Souris were dressed in that magnificent autumn splendor of the north. Strong, virile reds and oranges and yellows stood out intensely against the clear sky and the hard, crisp atmosphere.

Agnes watched and shivered. Her dreams at night were of Indians—Indian caravans streaming across the plains—Indians in camp—in ugly, dirty camps, as Agnes knew them, where they consumed dead animals drawn from the pasture fields—Indians creeping stealthily upon her as she slept. Here the child would awake, screaming, and, throwing her arms about Marie, would beg her sister not to let the Indians get her.

Autumn began to fade. Came two days when the strong wind drove gray sheets of water over the prairie, and rattled about among the poplars and maples and oaks. When the sun looked out again, the autumn leaves were running in little drifts under the trees. The air became acrid with the smell of burning stubble.

"When are the Indians going away?" Agnes asked Noonie.

"Soon," replied the old squaw, pointing to the trees, which had shed half their leaves.

Agnes made one more attempt to enlist her mother's help against the abduction that she so much dreaded. Mrs. Graydon was making crab apple jelly, which was unfortunate.

"What is it?" she asked, a little impatiently, as the child got in the way of her arm.

"Mother!"

"Yes—what is it?"

"Mother, the Indians are going away soon."

"I suppose so."

"You—you won't let Noonie take me, will you, mother?"

"No, indeed; but Noonie does not want to take you, dear. Don't be so foolish!"

III

THE next morning Agnes had disappeared.

Mrs. Graydon looked quickly toward the river, to see if the Indian village had gone also. It was still there.

She went direct to Noonie, and could not doubt the distress of the old squaw at hearing that her darling was lost. The Indian woman rose majestically from the blanket where she had been sitting cross-legged, fastened a handkerchief under her chin, and said firmly:

"I find!"

Tirelessly, with the long, even swing of the Indian, she led the searching party over plowed fields, through sloughs with grass to their hips, across heavy stubble, over burned fields still smoking and sending a tang into the mellow autumn air—all without finding a single clew.

By the afternoon a strong wind sprang up, and with it came a grayness in the atmosphere which made the old squaw stop and study the horizon. Sniffing the air like a bloodhound, she swung off faster than ever, leaving the rest of the party far behind her.

She was on the trail at last. Her practiced Indian eyes had seen signs of the child having passed that way—signs that had completely escaped the whites; but the same keen sense told her that the trail she was following led toward a prairie fire. Anxiously watching the horizon, she sped on, covering distance incredibly with the smooth, even swing of her people.

But if a squaw travels fast a prairie fire moves yet more swiftly, and the gray cloud came steadily nearer, filling the air with a heavy, acrid smell. The cloud parted at last, and Noonie could see a low wall of flame sneaking over the prairie, sometimes moving in a straight line, sometimes advancing in long peninsulas of flame. Desperately the squaw increased her speed, and came at last to the end of her trail. Sound asleep, near the edge of a dried slough, she found Agnes.

The squaw measured the distance to the fire, which was almost upon them. Too late to go back! Impossible to go ahead! Deliberately she stripped, and laid her great body over that of the sleeping child. With a roar and a swoop and a hiss the fire passed over, scorching and burning her horribly.

So the rest of the search party found them an hour later, Agnes moaning with pity by the side of the agonized squaw, who muttered, even as her spirit went out to the great Manitou:

"Good papoose! Ma papoose!"

Whether the fear of abduction which drove Agnes to run away from home had any foundation, or whether it was the creation of the child's too fertile imagination, will never be known; but if the squaw did intend to steal the little one to whom she had given her mother love, and if they had "*machtitsu*" written against her name up there, some good angel, when she paid the supreme price of that love, must surely have added "*nutchque.*"

Don't you think so?

THE PLUMMET

By this, albeit deep they be,
The hand may test the vasts of sea;
Yet who may sound, and by what art,
The fathoms of the human heart?

Clinton Scollard

Pride

THE STORY OF A FARM, A GIRL, AND TWO BROTHERS WHOSE IDEAS DIFFERED

By Boyd Fleming

THE girl seated on the rail fence stared with wide, pensive eyes across the newly plowed field for a time, and then glanced down at the head of the youth in overalls who stood beside her. A tiny, wistful smile parted her lips, and she lifted one hand and lightly stroked his wavy brown hair.

"You have never worked in the cities, Tom," she said softly. "Perhaps it would be just as discouraging as this farm. Every time your brother comes for a visit, it makes you more discontented. I wish you wouldn't feel that way!"

He glanced at the team standing patiently where he had left off plowing, and then lifted himself up beside her. The fingers that had been stroking his hair were captured in his own.

"Why wouldn't it make me discontented?" he growled. "Here I am, grubbing along day after day, and getting nowhere. I can't leave this farm twenty-four hours, but he can loaf around here for a week without worry. His work clothes are better than my best, and this time he came here in his own car. Lucy, if he can do it, I can—if I had the chance!"

"But James has nobody to look out for except himself. He—"

"That's just it!" cried Tom Ware, his gray eyes flashing. "Why can't I have that chance for a time? One of us must stay here and look after the old folks, but why must it always be me? Why must I be the one to give up everything?"

"You used to like it here," she said gently. "This discontent has grown within the last year or so."

"Can't you see, Lucy?" he pleaded. "I am helpless here. If I could get into something worth while, I could get ahead." He paused for an instant, then went on haltingly: "Lucy, I'm a down-and-outer. You're a fool to wait for me!"

She slid quickly to the ground and faced him. Her blue eyes were stern.

"Tom, that talk is all nonsense, and you know it!" she said sharply. "You're not a down-and-outer. If you were, it wouldn't make any difference about my waiting. We have talked all that over a hundred times. You can make a success of things if—"

"If I get the chance," he broke in bitterly; "and I have about as much chance as a cow!"

His gaze turned to the waiting plow, and a wave of dejection swept over him—deep, hopeless dejection. The soft breeze, fragrant with the odors of early spring, held no charm for him. He hated all that spring stood for—the plowing, the planting, and the figuring on crops. To him it seemed that the farm stood between him and his every desire—between him and the girl he loved.

His dejection must have showed in his eyes, for the girl came to his side and placed a sympathetic hand on his arm.

"Tom, you mustn't hate this farm," she said softly. "There's lots of happiness to be found here."

He looked down into her uplifted face—into the blue eyes that were deep with understanding—and a dryness gripped his throat. The smart of tears came to his eyes. Leaping to the ground, he swung out an arm and crushed her to him.

"Lucy," he murmured brokenly, "you are the dearest girl in the whole world!"

For a moment they stood there, her blond head pressed against his breast, and his arm tense about her shoulders. Then he drew a deep breath and released her.

"It's time for me to do the chores," he said quickly; "but I'm coming over to see

you after supper, and we'll talk things over. I'm going to find a way out of this beastly rut, or die trying!"

"I'll expect you to come over about seven," she said. "Please, Tom, don't worry yourself into a fit of blues! We're not old, and things have a way of turning out all right, if you give them time."

"I'll think of your eyes when I want to think of something blue, Lucy," he smiled. "I'll have to get the team to the barn and start chores now."

He jammed his battered hat on his head, and, with a sweep of his arms, lifted her to her own side of the fence. They glanced quickly about them, and then their lips met for an instant before she hurried across the fields toward home.

Tom Ware watched her out of sight. Then he unhitched the team from the plow and drove toward the distant barn. As he strode along behind the horses, his brows once more drew together in a scowl.

"Just the same, I'd like to see James staying here to keep care of the old folks while I had a try at something good!" he breathed. "He wouldn't stand it for a month!"

An hour later Tom gave a little grunt of disgust and tossed his milking stool into a corner.

"I don't see James offering to help with any chores," he grunted, as he placed the pail of milk outside the barn door and returned to let the two cows out of their stanchions. "You don't see him showing any interest in farming, except the eats! Ma sure makes a fuss over her meals when he blows in—even had to kill a hen, and they just starting to lay good!"

He jerked the barn door shut behind him and paused to light his pipe before taking the milk to the house. As he stood there, his gaze turned to his brother's car, which stood in the yard. An envious light flashed in his gray eyes.

"Fat chance I have ever to get a car!" he growled, as he looked at the big blue roadster with its bright nickel trimming. "I'll bet that cost him six or seven hundred, even if he didn't buy it new. I wish I had his job for awhile!"

He picked up the pail and moved slowly toward the house. His mother, a little gray-haired woman of about sixty, met him at the door. A happy light shone in her faded eyes, and her cheeks were flushed from bending over the kitchen stove.

"I'll put the milk in the pans, Tom," she said quickly. "You skip down cellar and see if you can find a can of my strawberry and pineapple preserves. James wheeled pa in from the porch, and supper is all ready, so hurry!"

"Nothing like being the prodigal son!" Tom murmured, with a half scornful smile, as he struck a match to see his way about the dark cellar. "It's too bad we haven't a fatted calf!"

The process of washing seemed to remove some of the gloom from Tom's tanned features. He was almost smiling when he took his place at the supper table.

"I turned the cows into the pasture," he said to his father, who sat in a wheel chair at the head of the table. "It's a little early yet, but the grass is good this spring."

"The grass is the best I've seen it in years," agreed his father, and then, turning to his other son: "The country must look good to you, James, after being in the city all winter."

"It certainly does, dad," laughed James Ware; "but the best part of it is ma's cooking."

Between James and Tom there was little likeness, in looks or in disposition. James was the taller of the two, and his eyes were a dark, snapping brown. Unlike Tom, he regarded life as anything but a serious adventure. His eyes were always dancing with laughter or anger, but his anger was of the hot, quick-flaring kind that cooled almost instantly.

"The cows will be glad to get on the grass," said his mother, as she poured steaming coffee into the big cups.

"How many are you keeping?" asked James.

"Two," answered his father.

"Two?" gasped James. "What's the big idea?"

"Nothing in producing milk," spoke up Tom. "The less cows you have to feed, the better off you are."

"Lots of people seem to be going into the hen business," said James. "I guess it's a pretty good game for the small farm."

"And a lot of people are going out of the hen business!" exclaimed Tom in a scornful voice. "I've fed hens all winter—to get a few cheap eggs in the spring!"

"How many hens have you?" James asked.

"Only fifteen—but that's fifteen too many!" snapped Tom.

James cast an amused glance out of the corners of his dark eyes at his younger brother, and then picked a subject for conversation that did not bear upon farming.

The remainder of the meal passed with jokes and stories from James, who, since leaving the farm ten years before, had led the existence of a rolling stone. James was twenty when he left the farm, and Tom a sturdy boy of fifteen, but at that time the father was strong and energetic. A fall from the barn roof, three years after James's departure, left William Ware a cripple. James returned at the time of the accident, and helped out on the farm for a year; but as his younger brother seemed capable of running it alone, he soon returned to his wandering life.

"What's this job you're going to out in Ohio, James?" his father asked during a lull in the conversation. "I thought the job you had in Buffalo was a mighty good one."

"Good? I made a bare living," replied James, his dark eyes scornful. "This job in Ohio, if I can land it, will amount to something."

Tom finished eating, and moved back from the table. James offered him a cigar, but he declined rather shortly, and filled his pipe.

"This working for a bare existence doesn't suit me," James went on. "There's always something better for a fellow, if he will go after it."

Tom rose from the table and moved slowly toward his bedroom.

"But you wrote that you were getting thirty dollars a week in Buffalo," his mother said.

"What does thirty dollars a week amount to?" snorted James. "A fellow can just squeeze through on that in the cities. You can't get a suit fit to wear for less than fifty dollars. A good shirt costs four or five. Why, you folks living out here, where—"

Tom did not wait to hear more. With a grunt of disgust he closed the door of his room behind him.

"A bare existence!" he breathed, thinking of the car out in the yard. "I'd like to exist like that!"

He quickly shed his working clothes and took his best suit from its hanging place—a nail in the wall. The suit—pants, coat, and vest—had cost him eighteen dollars.

"I wish he had to stick around here and cut cord wood to buy his clothes!" muttered Tom, as he picked out his least wrinkled tie. "I've had to stay here and grub along on nothing, while he lives high. When he blows in to loaf for a day or two, they fuss over him as if he was the greatest thing living. Ma works her head off for James, and doesn't seem to know I'm on earth!"

James was seated on the front porch when Tom came out a short time later. He cast a shrewd glance at Tom's change of clothes.

"Must be a young lady in the neighborhood," he said with a smile. "Who is she, Tom?"

"Lucy Abbott," was the careless reply.

"Old Hi Abbott's girl, eh?" said James. "Has she red hair, like old Abbott's?"

"Her hair is blond, like her mother's."

"I guess I don't remember her. Just a kid, isn't she?"

"If you call twenty-two a kid," snapped Tom.

"Don't want to be in any hurry to tie yourself up, Tom," said James, suddenly serious.

"Guess I'm pretty well tied right now," returned Tom, with a dry laugh, as he moved toward the road. "Fat chance I got to marry any girl!"

"Nice, cheerful sort of a crab!" James muttered to himself, as his brother's figure strode into the dusk. "She must find him hilarious company!"

It was after midnight when Tom returned, although he left Lucy Abbott's home about ten. The remaining two hours had been spent sitting on a rail fence between the two farms. Those two hours had been given to deep thought, which ended in a sudden gesture of determination.

"I'll do it!" he exclaimed, crashing one fist into the palm of the other hand. "Let him have a try at it, while I see a little money rolling in, and learn how to run a car!"

Leaping from the fence, he threw his pipe violently at the dark sky, and walked swiftly toward home.

II

On the following morning James Ware awoke to the wild clatter of a cheap alarm clock. For a moment he lay there staring in bewilderment at the faded ceiling. Then he struggled upright and located the cause of his awakening.

"Who in blazes put that thing there?" he snarled, as he grabbed the clock and smothered its clatter. "Just seven o'clock, and I—"

He broke off abruptly and blinked at a sheet of writing paper, well covered with writing, that was fastened to the foot of his bed with a pin. He snatched it to him, spread it on his knee, and read:

JAMES:

I set the alarm for seven, so you could get the chores done on time. Before going to the barn, you must build a fire in the kitchen stove, so ma can start the breakfast. I will be on my way long before you read this—to get the train that leaves Clark's Junction at three in the morning. I may be back in a year or so, and I may not be back at all. I borrowed your suit case and some of your best clothes. I found sixty dollars in your pocket, and borrowed thirty of that. I had twenty of my own, and fifty will pull me through until I get a job somewhere that's a long ways from this hole. There's no use of you trying to find me, or get word to me. I am just going to vanish.

It's your turn to take care of the folks for awhile. I will come back when I've had your chance to make big money. Of course, if you are not man enough to stay and look after the folks, you can skip out and leave them on the neighbors. I won't know it if you do, so don't get the idea that I will hurry back to take your place. It's up to you. TOM.

James read the letter through twice, and then rushed to the next room, where he had spread his clothes out on a spare bed. His best suit, his shirt, and his hat were gone. He swore savagely and long.

"Great grief!" he shouted, as he turned back to his room. "Has that fool gone bugs?"

He crossed his room and stared blankly from the window for a moment. Suddenly his gaze rested on his car in the yard, and a wild light of panic flashed in his eyes.

"Suffering cats!" he gasped. "I can't stay here! I've got four hundred to pay on that bus yet—fifty a month! I've got to head him off!"

He whirled about, tugging at the buttons on his pyjamas, and tripped over the alarm clock on the floor beside his bed. Dancing on one foot, he snatched up the clock and flung it against the wall.

"This is one sweet mess!" he fumed as he leaped into his trousers. "That Abbott kid will know where he is headed for—I'll see her!"

A few minutes later the big blue car whirled in at the Abbott farm. As James leaped out, he saw a girl leaving the chicken coop with an empty pail in her hand. He rushed to meet her.

"Are you Abbott's girl?" he demanded sharply.

A pair of large blue eyes met his calmly, and delicate lips formed a cool smile.

"I am," she said quietly. "What is the trouble, Mr. Ware?"

"Trouble is right!" snapped James. "Where is that kid brother of mine headed for? I've got to overtake him—quick!"

"I suppose you refer to Tom," she said. "I can't keep track of your family for you, Mr. Ware."

"Say, look here!" barked James. "This is no time for movie stuff! Where is he? This is serious—I've got to catch him!"

"Why?" she asked calmly.

"Why?" he roared. "Great grief! Do you think I can stick around here waiting for him to gad around the country seeing the sights?"

"He stuck around here for quite a few years," was the girl's cool reply.

"That's different!" James said impatiently. "This is his home. I can't—"

"You'll have to figure it out for yourself," she broke in, with a toss of her head. "There is no reason why I should tell you Tom's business."

She turned toward the house. James's chest suddenly swelled, and his face grew red. His dark eyes flashed sparks of anger. He shook a finger at her.

"You little dunce!" he exploded. "Snap out of that nonsense, and tell me where he is! I haven't got all day to stand here and—"

"You get into that car and travel!" she flashed, whirling toward him with flaming cheeks. "Your brother has stayed here and looked after your folks while you gadded all over the country. He gave up his chances to—"

"He took care of the old folks — my eye!" broke in James. "Where do you get all that stuff? Didn't he have the use of a good farm, with stock, tools, and all, to do it with? Father worked hard to pay for that farm, and I helped. When father was hurt, that farm was in good shape. Who is to blame if Tom let it get into the condition it's in now? You mean the old folks took care of him! Chances! Suffering cats! He had one of the best chances in—"

"Well, Mr. Ware," she cut in, "all those chances are now yours. Go ahead!"

For an instant James stared at her departing figure with open mouth. Then he

gave a grunt of disgust and walked back to his car.

The big car ate up the scant half mile that separated the two farms at one swallow, and jerked to a stop beside the barn. James remained in the seat and scowled.

"A fine pair of birds!" he muttered. "It certainly looks like a case of 'back to the farm' for me!"

He looked about him. In the lane stood the cows, gazing at him expectantly. Beside the barn door a big gray hen scratched energetically in some loose straw. The barn roof showed need of patching in several places, and the silo leaned at an alarming angle.

"A good eighty-acre farm, with two cows and fifteen old hens," he remarked. "Some farmer, that boy, I'll tell the world!" The scowl slowly left his face. "I've had all the chances, eh? I've a good notion to show those two gloom experts how to grab chances!"

A few minutes later he walked briskly toward the house. His mother looked up with a puzzled smile as he entered the kitchen.

"What in the world are you tearing up and down the road for, so early in the morning?" she asked.

James's face abruptly softened, and he broke into a gay laugh. He went to her and flung an arm about her thin shoulders.

"Ma, I've got a big surprise for you. Tom and I have swapped jobs for awhile. He has gone after my job, and I'm going to make the farm sit up and take notice!"

She only stared at him in bewilderment.

"Don't you get it, ma?" he laughed. "Tom had an idea that he could beat me at my job, and I—well, if I can't do better at this job than he did, I'll hire out for a scarecrow!"

"Tom—where is he?" she faltered.

"Gone, bag and baggage. He left on the three o'clock train this morning."

"James!" she gasped, dropping into a chair.

"That's right, ma—have a chair," he said. "I want you to answer a lot of questions. Is this farm clear—free from debt?"

"Your father finished paying for it long ago. You know that, James," she replied.

"Good!" he exclaimed. "Now, ma, you hustle breakfast, while I milk that mighty herd of cows. While we eat, we will discuss business with pa. We've got to get this farm under motion again!"

He snatched up a milk pail and departed swiftly toward the barn. His mother remained in the chair for a time, staring at the stove with wide, dumfounded eyes.

III

At breakfast that morning, questions and answers flowed swiftly. To his astonished mother and father James made it appear that he and Tom had talked over the matter thoroughly. Tom's abrupt and unexpected departure was the most difficult thing to explain.

"Tom was wild to go, but he felt a little guilty about it," James explained with an inward smile. "Being doubtful about how you would feel, we both thought it would be best to make a quick trade. That would avoid all argument, and—"

"But slipping out in the night!" exclaimed the father. "If he wanted to—"

"Now, dad," broke in James, "we've got all summer to think that out. Just now other things are more important. How many cows have you pasture for?"

"Oh, I guess it will take care of twenty. I used to—"

"Then why not have twenty?" flashed James.

"Well, James, Tom has changed a lot in the last three or four years. He kind of lost interest in the farm. I don't think he's been feeling any too well. He didn't raise any young stock, and our old ones were—"

Once more James interrupted—with an uplifted hand, this time. When he spoke, his voice was impatient.

"Let's leave Tom's ideas out of it. I've got to make more than a bare living out of this place. I've got to! You know I have a car out there in the yard. Well, I've got to pay fifty dollars on it the first of every month, or throw away the two hundred I've put in it. You made money on this farm—good money. Can't it make money now?"

A gleam of excitement glittered in the father's eyes for an instant, and then faded.

"If I had two sound legs," he said slowly, "I would make this farm clean up a good fifteen hundred a year."

"Use mine!" snapped James. "I'm not bugs on this farming game, but I'm going to show Tom—and some other people—that I haven't had all the chances in this family!"

The father's eyes looked shrewdly into his son's for an instant, and then a light of

understanding flashed in their gray depths. His lips tightened.

"So-o!" he breathed. "So that's how things are!" He turned to the troubled eyes of his wife. "Grace, I fear our boys have been having bitter words."

"Not a word of anger passed between us," denied James with a laugh.

"But is Tom coming back?" asked his mother, her voice holding a tremor.

"You just bet he'll be back—and glad to get here!" said James. "This farm will look a lot better to him after a few months of working for some one else. Now, ma, nix on that worry stuff! Let's get things in motion around here. We need some cows. That orchard needs looking after, and why keep a dozen hens when you have room for five hundred, by fixing up some of these old buildings?"

"Yes, I know," nodded his father; "but I don't like to sit here and pile work on some one else."

"Pile her on!" cried James. "I don't mind work, if there's anything in it. Remember, I've got to pay fifty dollars a month on that car."

"Well," frowned his father, "the first thing is to raise a little money to buy some stock and fix things up around here. I've hinted it for two years to Tom, but he didn't seem to take to the idea. I guess Jim White will give us a loan, with about all the time we want. You can bring him up some evening, and we'll talk it over."

When breakfast was over, James wheeled his father to the old man's favorite corner of the porch.

"James," said old Mr. Ware, "let's have the truth about this. What happened between you and Tom?"

For answer, James fumbled in his pocket and produced Tom's letter. His father read it slowly, and then handed it back. His face was pale.

"I felt that he looked at it in that way," he said. "That's the reason why I have never found fault with him, although the farm has been going down for the last three years. He isn't lazy, James—it's not that. I don't know what it is, but he seems to have lost all faith in the place. I suppose the far pastures look a sight better to him, and he can't rest until he tries them. Perhaps he's right."

He paused and gazed out across the fields. James said nothing, and for a time there was a thoughtful silence.

"There's no need of your staying here more than a few days, James," the father said at last, a note of weariness in his voice. "Mother can take care of one cow, and we can sell the other. The team can be—"

"I'm staying right here!" said James in a sharp voice.

"Why?" was the softly spoken question.

"Why?" snorted James, and then he smiled. "Pride, I guess, dad—just fool pride. Tom gets my goat, and I'd like to hand him a jolt when he comes back. The debt on that car is my main trouble."

"This farm can be made to pay for a car," said his father; "but the pride business is another matter. Pride can be a mean thing to handle. Pride may keep Tom from ever coming back."

"He'll be back—don't worry!" grunted James. "He can't scoop coin up with a shovel there, any more than he can here. He'll be glad to get back!"

"Maybe," said the old man doubtfully. "Maybe!"

IV

DURING the next few weeks fifteen new cows appeared on the Ware farm. The silo assumed a more dignified position, and the barn was brightened with new shingles. Several old sheds were torn down, and two large poultry houses came into existence. It became known that the Wares had a five-year lease on the twenty-five acres of hay land that belonged to the adjoining Whipple estate.

"It sure took a lot of money," James said to his father one evening, "but it will all come back. White said we could have all the time we wanted—that's one good thing."

The following afternoon, while inspecting fences, James paused for a time in the shade of a clump of young hemlocks. As he slowly stuffed tobacco into his pipe, he looked out across the farm to where a hired tractor was turning over furrows, three at a time. Every foot of workable soil on the Ware farm was under cultivation this year.

He was about to strike a match when he became aware that some one had approached the other side of the line fence behind him. Stooping, he peered beneath a fringe of hemlock, and saw the slender form of Lucy Abbott. She was gazing at the tractor, a queer little frown puckering her brows. James stepped quickly into the open.

" Curiosity once killed a cat," he said with a smile.

She gave a frightened jump, and faced him. Her cheeks flamed red for an instant, and then she turned away with a toss of her head.

" Just a minute!" he called. " I'd like to ask you a question."

She hesitated, and then turned back to the fence.

" I would like to know how Tom is making out," he explained.

" Curiosity once killed two cats," she flashed. " I told you once that I did not intend to tell Tom's business."

Blue eyes met brown eyes squarely for a moment, and then James gave a little shrug.

" That works both ways, doesn't it?" he asked.

Lucy Abbott's blue eyes looked at him questioningly.

" My business and his," James explained. " You should not tell Tom of my success."

" Your success?" she said with a faint smile, her brows arching. " Aren't you counting your success rather soon?"

James felt suddenly awkward, like a small boy who had been caught boasting. For the first time he realized that he was not talking to a child, but to a young woman, and a very attractive young woman at that.

" That is not answering my question," he said quickly.

" How am I to tell him anything?" she asked.

" By means of those nice long letters you exchange with him," he said, and then, as the blue eyes sought the ground: " Oh, you know where he is! But don't worry, I'll not spoil his fun by skipping out and forcing him to come back. When he comes back, it will be at his own request."

For a moment Lucy stared at the ground, and then she abruptly turned from him.

" Do as you please," she said coldly, as she walked away. " You can feel sure that he will never hear, through me, of any success you make."

James watched her lithe form swing across the field. Then he held a match to his pipe. His eyes were narrowed.

" So that's the lie of the land, eh?" he said aloud. " So you are the reason behind Tom's dislike for the farm! City-struck, eh? No danger of your telling him the farm can be made to pay! Well, we will see which makes the best argument—you, or the farm!"

That summer was a steady round of hard labor for James, but the Ware farm flourished as it never had before. James grew thinner, but he clung to his determination that he would make the place a success that would open his brother's eyes.

Early in the summer he found it necessary to hire a man—the first steady hired help the farm had ever known. Long into the evenings James and his father discussed ways and means, and the blue roadster covered many miles in the search for markets that would yield the best prices.

" If potatoes bring any price this year, you stand to make a nice little bunch of money, James," his father said one evening during haying time. " I don't know about your four hundred chickens—that's a new game to me, but you've got a fine bunch of cows to winter."

" The poultry will pay," said James in a positive voice; " and we can winter our cows in top shape. Our hay is good, the silo will be more than full, and our grain is going to be heavy. Things look mighty good to me. We've got a fine cream contract with the Powell Hotel people, and they'll be ready to buy our eggs."

Mr. Ware gave a sigh.

" James, I wish I had gone after those special markets, years ago—I'd be rich now. That comes from knowing the city end of farming."

" It will be an eye opener for Tom, when he comes back," James murmured.

" If he ever comes back," said his father, his eyes thoughtful. " You're depending on it, James?"

" Don't worry, dad," grunted James, as he rose to his feet with a yawn. " Tom will see his mistake about the farm. Me for bed—this haying job uses up a lot of sleep."

It was during haying time that James met Lucy Abbott again. He was on his way to the nearest village, to have a mowing machine part repaired, when he saw Abbott's spotted horse coming toward him, and recognized the driver as Lucy. It was their first meeting since they talked beside the line fence. He brought the big car to a stop beside the road, and waited, a harsh gleam in his eyes.

" Miss Abbott," he snapped, as she came

up beside the car, "I have a little favor to ask."

She faced him with a smile, but his lips remained in a straight line.

"The next letter you send to Tom, you might ask him if he can spare a few minutes to write to his mother," he said coldly. "I can see that she worries, and a letter now and then would make her happy. She will keep his letters secret, if he tells her he wishes it. I will see that she writes him no glowing letters about the farm that might tempt him back. That's all."

Without another glance at her astonished face, he let in the clutch, and the big car leaped forward with a roar.

A few days later James saw his mother hastily slip a letter beneath her apron. He smiled softly, and that night, at the supper table, he made it very plain that he did not want Tom to know anything about his success with the farm.

"I hope that confounded Abbott kid won't write and tell Tom what I'm doing with the farm," he said with a frown. "I don't want him to know a thing about it until he gets here."

V

It was a long, dry fall, and James had a harvest that left him smiling. After threshing and silo filling was over, he found his first opportunity to snatch a few hours now and then for recreation. A few times he drove to the nearest town and took in a moving picture show, but most of his spare time was spent roaming the wooded hills with a shotgun.

It was a hazy afternoon in late October when he again met Lucy Abbott. Returning from the woods, shotgun on shoulder, he saw her slender form seated on the top rail of the fence where he had surprised her in the spring. She was gazing out across the Ware farm, her chin cupped in one hand.

As James strode toward her, she looked up quickly and saw him, but did not leave, as he half expected she would. He smiled, and paused long enough to fasten his handkerchief to the barrel of the shotgun before advancing.

"Truce—to talk over peace terms!" he called, holding the gun aloft.

Her only answer was a slow smile. He placed the shotgun on the ground and seated himself on the fence a short distance from her. For a moment they both looked at the brilliant autumn landscape in silence, and then he turned toward her with a quizzical smile.

"I suppose that kid brother of mine is at the head of his own corporation by this time," he said.

She did not reply, but her slender brows drew together in a frown.

"Fooling aside," he said quickly, "I would like to know how Tom is making out."

"Why couldn't Tom have done all this?" she asked in a grave voice, swinging her hand toward the farm that James had transformed.

"He could, but he didn't have to," replied James, after a moment of scowling hesitation.

"Did you have to?" she asked sharply.

"I did!" was the grim reply.

"Why?" she asked with a quick glance.

"Because Tom slipped out that morning and left me with a car to pay for," said James, with a little smile. "Another reason was that you both thought this farm couldn't be made to pay. I had to prove it could pay. Has Tom done any better in the city?"

"I can assure you that Tom hates the city," she replied quickly.

"I thought he would," James said slowly. "He's not the type for that game. If you two had got the notion out of your heads that this place couldn't make a good profit—"

"I never thought this farm couldn't make a good profit," she said quietly. "I'm not a dunce, if you did call me one the first time you saw me. It's a good farm, and it will pay, but I never dreamed you could do anything with it."

"And you're not very pleased that I have," he said dryly.

"Why should I be?" she asked. "It has upset all my plans for Tom. He's coming back this week, and—"

"Tom? This week?" cried James, an eager light in his eyes.

"Yes, for a visit over Saturday and Sunday," replied Lucy, in a lifeless voice.

"I see!" he said. "You're afraid he will decide to stay, now that I have proved that the farm is a good thing."

Her blue eyes turned and looked searchingly into his face for an instant. For the first time James noted a tense, hopeless light in their depths.

"You are the dunce," she said. "When

he sees what you have done here, he—he can't stay."

There was a little tremor in her voice, and she turned her head quickly.

"I don't quite get that," confessed James, staring at her blankly.

"Can't you see?" she asked sharply. "If he found you making a failure here, he could come back; but after all the work you have done, he can't. Don't you suppose Tom has any pride?"

James thought it over for a moment, his eyes wide.

"Say, do you mean to tell me that you want him to come back to farming?" he demanded.

"Of course I do," she said.

"Then why in time did you ever encourage him to skip out?"

"I thought it would do him good—that the farm would look better to him after trying something else," she explained. "He was growing uneasy and discontented—thought he was missing something big by staying here. I knew he would never make good here until he got that notion out of his head. I knew he would soon get sick of the city, but I also knew he would hate to give up and come back. I thought you would just storm around here for a month or two, and then arrange it so that he would have to come back."

She paused for a moment. James only blinked at her in voiceless amazement.

"That's all wrecked," she went on. "He will hang on and try to make a success where he is. He can't come back here and take advantage of your success. He has too much pride for that."

"You mean to say I've got to stay here, just to please his fool pride?" James burst forth suddenly. "Say, I was game to teach him a little lesson, but I didn't bargain to swap places with him for keeps! You talk as if I had wronged him by pounding a little pep into this place! Pride! Say, what about my pride? You both put it up to me that I couldn't make my salt on this farm. You played me for the goat, and now—"

"I know," she broke in quickly. "Please don't think I blame you. Tom had his chance, and was too blind to see it. He will have to make the best of things as they are."

"Great grief!" roared James, his eyes flashing fire. "He'll have to come back here! I don't want to stick here much longer. I tell you he'll have to get back here!"

"He never will," she said. "You don't know how stubborn his pride can be. He would think he had no right to come back after you had things going so well."

"I can tell him I don't want to stay here under any conditions on earth!"

"He would never believe it, after the work you have done," said Lucy, with a shake of her head. "He would think you were just giving him the farm back out of pity. He would feel sure that you knew of his discouraged feeling about the city. He would think I had been talking to you about him, and he would hate me for it. He has a stubborn streak of pride that is impossible to deal with."

"I can skip out on him, like he did on me!" snapped James.

"The result would be a wreck, just the same. He would still feel that it was a sacrifice for him. He would let the farm sink back into the rut. I know him better than you do."

James slid from the fence and paced back and forth, his brows drawn into a savage scowl. Suddenly he paused and faced her. The scowl slowly lifted. Going to her side, he placed a hand on her arm for an instant.

"Do you really care for that kid brother of mine?" he asked softly.

She turned her head quickly, but not quickly enough to hide the quivering lips and the sudden moisture that filled her eyes.

"Never mind—I have the answer," said James.

"I—I care everything—for him," she whispered, her blue eyes blinking back the tears. "I thought this would all turn out well, but I guess—"

"It will turn out well," he said, with sudden confidence in his voice. "I can stand it here—"

"You must not give up your plans for him," she broke in quickly. "You have done enough to—"

"Listen here!" James interrupted. "Tom is going to stay right here, and without hurting that precious, mulelike pride of his! I've got it all doped out!"

She looked at him questioningly, a doubtful light in her eyes.

"I'll put it up to him to stay and help me run this farm on a partnership basis—that I can't handle it alone. I'll let him

see that I need him badly—that it is his duty to stay and help me."

"But that will keep you here, and you say you don't want to stay here," objected Lucy.

"I'm coming to that part," he smiled. "After things are going all right, I'll suddenly hate farming, and make him buy out my interest at a fair price. What's wrong with that little idea?"

"It might work," she said after some thought.

"You will do all you can to make him feel that his duty is to stay and help me?"

"You know I will," she said.

"All set, then!" laughed James, picking up his gun.

She slid to the ground upon her own side of the fence, and then extended her hand boyishly.

"I owe you a lot of thanks," she smiled.

"Forget it!" he laughed, as their hands met in a firm clasp. "I've had a lot of fun out of this!"

"Some fine girl, at that!" James breathed, as he watched her slender figure vanish over the hill. "If Tom doesn't listen to her this time, he's a fool!"

VI

THE big blue roadster was waiting at Clark's Junction when Tom Ware stepped from the train.

"James, that was a mean trick I pulled off," he began, as the brothers shook hands. "I've brought back your—"

"Wipe it all off your mind, Tom," laughed James, leading the way to the car. "I've done pretty well here on the farm, and you look as if you owned the mint, so who has any kick coming?"

"I felt pretty mean about it," Tom insisted. "I'm mighty glad if you've made ends meet on the old farm."

"The old farm isn't such a bad business proposition as it might be," said James. "It looks to me like a good thing, if it's worked right. That farm is a money maker, Tom, if a person could run it right. I have a proposition to make you, after you have looked it over."

"What kind of a proposition?" Tom asked in some surprise.

"A good one for both of us," was the quick reply; "but we'll not talk about it until you have one of mother's company dinners under your belt. Tell me about yourself."

James explained his proposition in detail that afternoon, after Tom had examined the new poultry houses, inspected the cows, and heard about the leasing of the Whipple property.

"There's a good thing here, Tom," he said. "There's a mighty good thing here, but it is more than I can handle alone. It's up to us to go into partnership on this place, and make it hum."

Tom looked out across the fields for a moment, and then frowned slightly.

"It's darned white of you to talk that way, James," he said; "but I couldn't take you up on it."

"Why?" James demanded.

"I'd look nice stepping into the game now, after you've made the place what it is!" replied Tom. "You've just got it to a point where it will pay, and I realize how you've had to work."

"Nonsense!" snorted James. "You don't get the point. There's nothing generous about my offer. I need you here. I've got things where I can't swing them alone. It will take both of us to work this farm as it should be worked."

"The time when it needed two of us has passed," said Tom. "You've done two men's work all summer. You've done fine, and it's not for me to horn in now."

They argued for the better part of an hour, Tom growing more set every minute, and James fighting to control his temper.

"It would clean you up more real money at the end of a year than any dinky job in the city!" James snapped at last. "You must know that by this time."

"I don't know about that," Tom said stiffly, a slight color warming his cheeks. "I have been doing pretty well—probably a lot better than you think."

James saw his blunder. Suddenly he thought of Lucy Abbott, and forced a smile. Perhaps she could talk his obstinate brother into remaining.

"Well, Tom," he said, "I hate to have you go back. We are both needed on this farm. Suppose you sleep on the idea for one night? I still have hopes that you will see it my way."

"All right—I'll think it over," said the younger brother; "but I doubt if any amount of thinking will change my answer. You know just as well as I do, James, that both of us together couldn't anywhere near double the income you could make running this farm alone."

To this, James could think of no satisfactory reply. They turned and walked slowly toward the house and supper.

As before, James was seated on the porch when his brother started for the Abbott farm.

"Going over to call on Lucy Abbott, eh?" he smiled. "Take my car, Tom. You said you had learned to run one."

"Well, I'd certainly like to," replied Tom, after an instant of hesitation; "but I guess I'd better not. I—"

"Go ahead! Take it!" insisted James.

"You might want to use it, and—"

"Not I," grunted James. "I don't use it once a week. It's all ready to step on. Take it by all means."

As Tom hastened toward the shed that sheltered the car, James gave a low laugh of satisfaction.

"Going to be a nice, moonlight night. Do your best, Lucy!" he muttered.

It was after midnight when James was awakened by the throb of the roadster's engine. The lights splashed through his bedroom window as the car turned in at the drive.

"All over but the shouting," he muttered sleepily. "If big blue eyes, a moonlight night, and a car built for two can't change his mind, then there's no possible use of my trying!"

James did not see Tom until the morning chores were finished. He was just closing the barn door when he espied his brother coming from the house.

"Well, Tom, have you decided to stay here and run this farm with me on a partnership basis?" he asked in a tense voice.

"No, I haven't," replied Tom, with a slow smile. "You made the farm what it is, and I—"

"You're a fool!" James exploded, his face flaming with anger. "Don't start in on that old song again! I wouldn't have you for a partner if I had to stay here and rot! I suppose you've forgotten that you shoved this job onto me with the understanding that I was just taking your place for awhile?"

He paused and glared at his brother, but Tom, amazed, made no attempt to defend himself.

"I suppose I haven't any right to throw this job back on your hands, eh?" James thundered on. "I never made any bargain about trading places with you, that I know of; but we're going to make one now!"

He paused, drew a roll of bills from his pocket, and tossed it upon the ground between them.

"There's two hundred in that roll," he said. "Two hundred buys all the other fellow's interest in this farm—all of it, do you understand? You can take that two hundred and go, or give me two hundred and I will go. It is also understood that the one who stays here has one year to win Lucy Abbott."

"Wha-what do you mean by that?" gasped Tom, who had been trying to speak.

"I mean that for one year, starting right now, the chance of winning Lucy goes with the farm. If you leave this farm, you leave with the money and that agreement."

Tom stared at his brother with wide eyes, while his face turned from red to white.

"Well?" snapped James.

"Let's talk this over, James," Tom began. "You see, I—"

"What?" roared James. "You hesitate when—say, you're worse than a fool—worse than I thought!" His jaws clicked together and his lips grew thin. "Take your choice!" he said coldly.

"But listen, James—you don't—"

"Decide!" James shouted threateningly. "Take that two hundred and get out, or give me two hundred and I'll get out! If you haven't got the cash, I'll take a promise—but decide quick!"

For a full minute Tom stared at the bills on the ground, while strange expressions crossed his face in waves. At last he leaned down and picked up the bills. For an instant longer he hesitated, and then he thrust the money into his pocket and turned quickly toward the house.

"You — you take the first train — and you walk to the station!" James called after him, his voice quivering with rage.

VII

A FEW minutes later, with James at the wheel, the big blue roadster went tearing aimlessly over the hills.

From a distance James saw his brother board the afternoon train at Clark's Junction. He watched until the train vanished around a curve, and then he headed the big car toward the Abbott farm. His face was pale and drawn.

"A nice sort of a fellow, that brother of mine!" he breathed. "Lucy loves him, but she's well rid of him!"

As he drove into the yard, Lucy rushed from the porch to meet him. Her face was flushed, and her blue eyes danced with excitement. As James stepped from the blue roadster, she held one finger of her right hand before his eyes. On the finger was a plain gold band.

"Wha-what's that?" gasped James.

"A wedding ring, of course!" she laughed. "I am now your sister-in-law, James. Tom said that I could be first to tell you. We were married last night at my grandfather's house, over in Elkdale."

"Last night? Did you say last night?" James cried.

She nodded, her laughing blue eyes searching his.

James dropped weakly to the running board of his car and closed his eyes for an instant. When he opened them, she was holding an envelope toward him.

"What's that?" he asked.

"A letter that Tom told me to give you right after I told you about our marriage."

"When did he leave it?" he demanded sharply.

"On his way to the train. Read it!"

James tore open the envelope and drew forth the letter.

JAMES:

Lucy and I were married after I had decided to return to the farm and give you your freedom. That is what I was about to tell you when you jumped down my throat with your crazy new idea. I took your two hundred to buy a secondhand car that I know is a good buy for quick cash. When I get back, I will raise some money and square up with you. If you made the farm pay for a car, I can. I will hang on to that much of my fool pride. TOM.

James read the letter twice, and then turned to Lucy.

"How did you do it?" he breathed.

"I lost my temper trying to get him to take your partnership offer," she said, with a blush. "I told him everything — just what a selfish, blind, stubborn fool he was making of himself."

"Great grief!" shouted James, with a roar of laughter. "Poor Tom returned to a hornet's nest!" He suddenly held out his hand. "Sister, a little temper beats a lot of pride. Shake on it!"

THANKSGIVING VOICES

BEFORE the dying of the day
I heard clear lyric voices say,
"Thanksgiving! Oh, thanksgiving!"
Now near they were, now far away.

They seemed to come from barn and byre;
They mounted with ecstatic fire—
"Thanksgiving! Oh, thanksgiving!"
They made a most melodious choir.

They rose from garth and field and stream
Like echoes from the hills of dream—
"Thanksgiving! Oh, thanksgiving!"
That was their sole harmonic theme.

They were the voices of the earth
Which is the mother of all mirth—
"Thanksgiving! Oh, thanksgiving
For every bounty brought to birth!"

"For all that is and yet shall be
Until shall part the land and sea,
Thanksgiving! Oh, thanksgiving
To the Great Will eternally!"

Archibald Crombie

The Harbor of Dead Ships

BOTH SHIPS AND MEN MAY BE LAID UP AS USELESS, AND YET MAY SAIL FORTH ON A NEW VOYAGE

By Belle Burns Gromer

THE fog trailed in filmy wisps and softly veiled the lines of the lake and the hillside. Huddled together on a knoll that jutted out from the steep slope above the water, a man and a girl peered into the mist. The grass beneath their feet was pearled with dampness. A few hazel bushes bent above them, and a fallen tree trunk served them for a seat.

The hillside about was dotted with houses, and in the lake below the silent shapes of ships rested at anchor or lay tied to the gray wharves; but the two on the knoll seemed apart from the life that surrounded them. Far to the left, the busy city loomed faintly through the fog. To the right, at the end of the lake, a sawmill and bustling factories hummed beyond the curtain of the mist; but here on this near shore there was a strange silence—a haunting feeling of mold and decay; for this was the harbor of dead ships, the port that held the rotting hulls that never again would go through the locks of the canal and forth into the open sea.

Suddenly the man leaned forward and strained his eyes toward the outline of the drawbridge that hung in the distance, across the entrance to the canal. He was young, this man—not more than twenty-five or twenty-six; but life had etched lines of suffering and sadness upon his face. His bewildered blue eyes held a hint of tragedy. There were faint shadows below them, and his cheeks were sunken and pale beneath the tinge of brownness that remained.

"Do you see the old ship, Lars? She should be coming soon."

The girl huddled closer and curled her warm fingers over the listless hand of the man. She was Ingrid, daughter of old Axel Jorgenson, owner of the small greenhouse at the top of the hill, where he grew the double violets that he forced for the year-round trade.

Ingrid was like the violets, Lars thought. He turned his eyes to watch her as she sat there by him. A flash of pain crossed his face. He wanted her so—but he mustn't think of her in that way any more. He would have to go out of her life.

It was hard to think of the girl he loved as—well, just a friend. That was all that she could be to him now. He wouldn't ask a girl like Ingrid to throw herself away on a cripple. She was sweet and fragrant, like the flowers that her father tended, and her eyes were purple-blue, as the violets were. Lars's hair was dark as bronze, while the heavy braids that coiled about Ingrid's small head were so pale that they were like white gold.

"The draw's raising. I guess she's coming now."

The man's voice was husky with emotion. He peered across to where the scarcely discernible outlines of the draw disappeared in the skeleton lines of the girders. Moments passed, and then, faintly through the mist, the masts and then the hull of a ship appeared. Lars felt the girl's fingers close more tightly over his. Strange surgings seemed to flow up through his blood and into his mind as the tug at its bow brought nearer the ghostly hulk that had once been the proud ship Eastern Dawn.

The man's teeth made purple marks in his lower lip as he thought of his father, the old Viking with the flowing beard, who for thirty years had commanded this dead ship that was floating in to its last resting place.

"I'm glad father didn't live to see this day! It 'd 'a' broken his heart, I guess. Seems like something stepped in an' let him die on the last voyage of his command. It's

good he didn't know they'd decided to retire the old ship. He'd never admit that sailing vessels had outlived their usefulness."

"You miss him so—I know that, Lars!"

"I wish I could 've seen him once more; but I was dreading how he'd take the company's orders. When the Eastern Dawn came into the harbor that day, an' they told me dad was gone—honest, Ingrid, I was almost glad. He'd 'a' taken it so hard!"

"Your dad loved every timber an' spar of her—I know that. He was so proud of her! I can see him now, standing there by the wheelhouse like he used to!" She watched her companion through anxious eyes. "The cap'n was proud of you, too, Lars. My, how his eyes would shine when he talked of you! Being together from the time you were a little fellow brought you close, I guess. The cap'n always thought you'd do fine things. He seemed always to count on your being a great credit to him. How he counted on this voyage home, when he expected to see you go out with your first command!"

The man shrugged hopelessly. His voice was flat.

"I'm a credit, all right! A cripple—part of me dead! I remember what he said that day when they pulled me out from under that mess of splintered mast. It was only six months ago, out there in the China Sea, an' it seems like ten years. They got me into the cabin. I knew what was going on around me, but I didn't feel much pain. The typhoon was raging, and the men were shouting to be heard. I could hear dad's voice. 'Better he'd die, Willum, than be maimed. I love him too much to want that!'"

Lars laughed harshly.

"But I didn't die, you see," he continued. "I'm here alive—part of me is, but my arm, my right arm, is a dead thing. They shipped me home from China for me to end this way. Go out with my own ship now? Why, I'm no master! How could I hold the respect of my men? A cripple couldn't do that. Like the Eastern Dawn, I am—a living dead thing. I wish to Gawd I *was* like her! She's lived. She's had storm an' calm an' fair winds; an' me? I'm half dead before I've ever lived!"

His young face was distorted with lines of bitter pain. Ingrid turned away her pitying eyes.

"I think the old vessel and this place make you sadder, Lars. Why don't you find something else to do? Better that you should go away from here, perhaps."

"What else can I do? I've sailed with dad since I was a kid. I know ships and the sea. I have my master's papers, but I have little schooling. A sailorman learns by experience, not by books. What good am I now, with a paralyzed arm? No use aboard ship! I'm lucky that the company thought enough of dad to give me this berth of watchman. I'll try an' pick up something else, later. I don't know what, but something, maybe."

The girl frowned and swung about.

"Lars, I don't like the way you act over this—beaten, kind of. The cap'n wasn't like that. He wasn't a quitter, ever. Remember when he brought the Eastern Dawn through such a storm as was never known before? He was never beaten. Why, you're young—your whole life's there, to make something fine out of; an' yet you act like you were through. There's me, Lars—don't I mean anything? Wouldn't you make a try at things for me? Keep on here as watchman, if you want, but study—learn—try for something better. Lars, you've got to forget about your arm. You know what that last doctor said—nerves, muscles, lots of things he talked about; but the main thing that stayed in my mind was when he said that he didn't believe there was anything wrong that couldn't be righted if you'd make a try. Remember how he said, 'It's nine-tenths up to you.' I've thought an' thought about that. Lars, won't you make the effort to beat this thing?"

"It's all right to talk of trying, Ingrid, but you don't know what it means till you've been through it. I don't want you to think I'm a quitter. I guess it's been too short a time for me to get used to it. Six months to get used to the thought of going through life like this!"

Ingrid shook her head. Her eyes told him that he didn't understand, that she was disappointed in him. The bitter lines drew down about his mouth. She expected him to use his arm because one doctor told him there was nothing wrong with him! That was bunk! Wouldn't he be whole again if he could? Hadn't it hurt to see another man take out the new ship that was to have been his? He couldn't help it if he had been afraid to make the try. It was good of the company to have had a faith

in him that he hadn't in himself; but he had been afraid!

II

THE Eastern Dawn was almost in. The tug edged her along slowly.

The man pulled himself to his feet. He was a tall, well built figure, though gaunt from his recent illness. Unconsciously he tried to reach out to help Ingrid with his crippled arm. His face flushed dully when he remembered.

"I'd like to see her make the landing." His words were halting. "After that I'd like to talk to you, Ingrid. I want to tell you something."

The girl did not answer for a moment. Her eyes turned to the ship.

"Will Karl be in command to-day?" she asked, and her voice held an undertone of sadness.

"I s'pose he will. The mate would bring her in, sure."

"I—I'm worried about Karl—terribly worried. He's not been home but once for an hour or two, ever since the Eastern Dawn came into the harbor. More than two weeks, it is. Papa feels it so! He doesn't say much, but Karl's always been his favorite—an only son an' all. Lars, I'm afraid he's in bad company. When he used to pal around with you, I always felt so safe about him. Since—since you were hurt—since he got away from your control—he isn't the same. He used to worship you like a hero, you know. Ever since your first trip together when you were youngsters, and you gave him a licking that time, he's thought more of you than any man living. Karl—well, he's kind of wild and hard to manage. It was good for him to be with you; but now—"

Her voice trailed off into silence.

"Oh, he's all right, I guess. He's a good kid. Don't worry about him, Ingrid. I'll speak to him, if you want me to."

The girl smiled.

"You seem older than Karl—much older. It's only a year, but you speak like his grandfather. We've always tried to take care of him, haven't we? Maybe you better not say anything to him yet. We'll wait awhile and see. Perhaps he'll be home more. I wonder what he'll do now that the Eastern Dawn is tied up! Papa was so proud to think of his boy shippin' mate with Cap'n Erickson. I—I'd hoped that he'd sail with you soon."

"I won't be sailing again," said Lars.

His voice was flat, final. He turned away, and Ingrid followed him along the path that led down to the gray wharves. Just before the gates a flashy sedan painted a vivid crimson gave a touch of color to the somber scene. From behind the glassed sides of the car two hard young faces gazed out at the man and the girl. Street girls, Lars thought. One of them was smoking a cigarette, the other was applying lip rouge to a mouth that was already like a purple wound.

The watchman at the gate stepped aside to let Lars and Ingrid pass. They stood with one or two of the company's men as the tug edged the Eastern Dawn into her resting place. It was like a funeral, Lars mused, and they were the mourners.

Young Herrick, son of the president of the company, nodded carelessly to Lars and took off his hat to Ingrid. He was a handsome man in the late twenties, with dark lines of dissipation beneath his already weary eyes. The flashy car at the gate was his. He wouldn't be there if his father was about, Lars thought. Mr. Herrick was a fine man. He hadn't much time for this son who had disappointed him so bitterly. Fine company the young fellow kept! Those two girls in the car were his speed.

By the wheel on the afterdeck, where Lars had seen his own father stand so many times, he spied the figure of Karl, Ingrid's brother. Old Willum peered down at him from near the bow—old Willum, who had sailed with the cap'n for thirty years. There were only a few others aboard. The men had been paid off and dismissed when the ship had come into Seattle harbor, two weeks before.

The lines secured, Karl waved to them and then disappeared down the hatch that led to the cabin. Old Willum swung quickly over the side to the wharf.

"Hey, Mr. Lars! Cheer-o!"

Coming into the shadow of the warehouse, the little cockney patted Lars affectionately on the shoulder, and turned his head aslant to gaze up at him with his small, bright eyes.

"Lookin' kind o' peeked you be, lad! That 'll never do. You'll 'ave to win back to the strappin' buck you used to be afore you can tike yer own ship to sea!"

"My ship's gone without me, Willum. I wasn't fit to take her out."

"But that's what you got to be, lad!

Why, when the cap'n was a dyin', 'e says to me, 'e says, 'Willum, tell my boy 'e's the last o' us that's allus followed the sea. Lars, son o' Eric, 'e is. Tell 'im I'm proud o' 'im, an' I'll be a watchin' when 'e tikes 'is first ship out. Tell 'im I'll allus be a watchin' an' knowin' that 'e's goin on like 'is father did afore 'im.' You couldn't disappoint the skipper, now could you, lad?"

"But my ship's gone, Willum!"

"Maybe later, Lars — maybe later. They's other ships; but you got to be ready an' waitin'!"

Lars did not reply. Willum couldn't understand. He didn't know the doubts and fears that could jag themselves into a man's mind. No one understood the horror that Lars lived in—the fear that circled about him like a sooty mist. He was afraid, and he couldn't help himself.

A hearty laugh rang out, and a tall young figure stood in the doorway of the warehouse. Ingrid ran to meet the handsome youngster.

"Hello there, kiddo!" Karl lifted the face so like his own, and kissed his sister heartily. "Well, Lars, old son! Glad to get a sight of you!"

Lars's eyes were shining with his pleasure at seeing Karl. He liked the kid for more reasons than just because he was Ingrid's brother. They shook hands and took stock of each other with searching eyes, in the way that sailormen have.

"Your last voyage put a layer o' muscle on you, boy. You're lookin' top notch!"

Lars felt the younger man's arm. Like solid rock, he thought admiringly. He had been in trim like that himself, not so long ago. What a lucky kid Karl was—a real man—all there!

"Well, how does it seem to see your bunky bring in the old bucket o' junk?" said Karl. "About time she was hittin' the bone yard!"

Lars winced at the words. The Eastern Dawn was part of him, and even in fun he didn't like to hear Karl talk that way about her. It was as if she would hear and be hurt. She had meant so much to his dad and to him!

They didn't build ships like this one nowadays. Lars would never think of her as anything but the stanchest clipper that ever weathered a gale. You couldn't be put out with Karl, though. He hadn't meant anything by what he said. He surely was a fine-looking kid—tall and strong, and his head, with its smooth white-gold hair, held high. He was a trim sailorman in his neat serge. All that this boy needed was a guiding hand until he outgrew his foolishness. Ingrid needn't worry — Karl would turn out all right.

"Any plans?" Lars asked.

"Plans? Say, listen to this! I'm goin' up for my master's papers next week or so. How's that for a bum sailor? I'll bunk on the Lady Tafton over there — Goodman, the superintendent, said it would be all hunky with him—until the new ship comes from the Orient. I'm to go out mate of her, if one of those German subs doesn't get her first. Some war they're having on the other side, eh? Well, after that, maybe one o' these days they'll give me my own ship. What do you think of that?"

"Why, Karl!" said Ingrid. "Aren't you coming home? Why should you bunk on the Lady Tafton, dear? Papa'd be so hurt. You won't do that, surely?"

"Listen, Ingrid! I'd rather stay down here. Oh, I'll run in often, only—well, a fellow's got to have a little freedom, an' pop's always butting into my affairs—asking what time I got home an' all, an' me a grown up sailorman! Off on a voyage as long as I'll be, I've got a right to step out a little in port!"

The girl's eyes were troubled, but she smiled.

"But you'll come for supper? We're expecting you."

"Sure will, hon. Don't be mad at me. You know how pop is—narrow as the devil. I'll come on up now. Got a date for tonight, so let's chow early, eh?"

As they passed through the gates and started up the hill, Lars saw one of the girls in the sedan lean out and speak to young Herrick. A moment later the young man called after them:

"Oh, Jorgenson! Come back a moment, will you?"

"Wait for me," said Karl.

He ran back to the gates. Ingrid and Lars saw the owner's son introduce him to the two girls. They seemed to be urging him to get into the car, but he pointed to the two who waited on the hillside, and came away, laughing. Just before he reached Ingrid and Lars, one of the girls leaned out of the car and shrilled:

"I'll get you yet, blondy! You'll see!"

"Suits me, sweetness!" Karl replied gayly.

He was still laughing when he came up to Lars and his sister.

"A great pair! Pretty, that black-eyed one!"

"Karl! Those painted women!"

Ingrid's voice sounded prim. No way to handle the boy, Lars thought!

Karl didn't answer, but went ahead whistling.

"Didn't know you were friendly with young Herrick, fellow," said Lars.

"Oh, I've seen him in town a time or two. I sort o' know one o' those girls."

Karl had probably got in with Greg Herrick hanging around the Neptune Café, thought Lars. That was no place for a decent kid, that low dive on Cherry Street! Dancing—rotten dancing—bad liquor, and a lot of shady vaudeville acts that they called a cabaret—these were the inducements offered. He would have to look out for Karl.

Then Lars's lip curled in a spasm of self-contempt. He had better learn to look out for himself, first! He couldn't hope to make Karl listen to him now. He couldn't keep the boy's respect. A weakling couldn't do that—a man who was afraid of his own shadow!

At the picket fence before the Jorgenson cottage, Lars paused. Karl ran up the path bordered with snowy clam shells, and entered the door.

"You'll come for supper, Lars?" Ingrid invited him. "Peach jam, and the kind of nut cookies that you like. I made them this morning, specially for you."

He looked away and did not answer.

"At six, then? You'll come in at six for supper—or perhaps half past five? Karl said he would be going somewhere."

"I—I won't be coming, Ingrid."

He kept his eyes from hers.

"Lars!"

"I'm not coming to-night. I'm not coming again, ever. It's what I wanted to tell you, Ingrid. I mustn't see you so often. I mustn't see you at all, after this."

The girl's hand caught at her throat, and her eyes widened.

"Be-because you don't — care — any more?"

"*Care!*" The young face twisted with pain. Lars's fingers closed over the gate latch until his knuckles stood out whitely. "I'd be a fine one to tell a girl I cared, wouldn't I?"

"Is it because of your arm, Lars—because you are poor? You know that doesn't make any difference to me. I—I'd live aboard the old ship. I wouldn't mind, if you were there, dear!"

The man pointed to the bedraggled-looking hulk at the gray wharf.

"You think I'd take you to that place? Dirty, now, an' damp—an' I could give you just enough food to keep you alive, on what I'll make. Well, I don't want you that way!"

Ingrid's eyes blazed into his.

"You don't want me! Because you're letting this thing get you, you'll break my heart and your own! Oh, you aren't facing this as you should! You're giving up! You're a quitter!"

Lars did not answer. Perhaps it was best that it should end this way. He felt as if his heart was being torn into shreds of agony. He loved her, but she didn't understand. He wasn't what she had said. No—he wasn't a quitter. She just didn't understand!

With her fingers held tightly over her lips to still the sobs that finally would come, Ingrid turned and ran up the path to the house. The man stumbled along the road down the hill.

III

In the dreary days that followed Lars seldom saw the girl. At first she came often to the wharf, but he never opened the gate, and of late she had kept away. For all her little soft ways she had plenty of spirit. Lars knew that she wouldn't come again, and his heart was like a great weight in his breast. He ached for a sight of her.

His job did not keep him very busy, and he had too much time to think. There were eight ships tied at the gray wharves, and it was his duty to visit them twice a day, to see that all was well. Not that it made much difference what happened to the old hulks. Why should any one care what happened to this useless mass of rotting wood? Why should any one care about any useless thing?

There were odd jobs of dismantling to be done aboard the Eastern Dawn. It was slow work, with only one hand. Lucky for Lars that time didn't matter! It wasn't much use trying for any other place. This was about all that he was fit for.

He dwelt on these thoughts as he passed along the narrow boardwalk that ran from

the anchored nest of four ships to the four tied to the wharf. Life seemed blacker than ever to-day.

As he boarded the Eastern Dawn, an hour before, he had seen the red sedan stop at the foot of the hill, and Karl had alighted. Ingrid had been descending the path, and she had stood still while her brother called drunken pleasantries to the occupants of the departing car. Then Karl had caught sight of his sister. Lars had watched the two go up the hill, Karl swaying slightly.

His heart ached as he thought how Ingrid must suffer to see her loved brother so. The father, too—how both of them must suffer! The boy had been with young Herrick and the black-eyed girl almost constantly of late. He was always slightly drunk.

Lars knew that Ingrid would blame him for not looking after Karl; but how could he? He had no influence with the boy any more.

It was late afternoon. The sun hung dully red over the entrance of the canal, and turned the gray of the lake to angry crimson. The smoke of the autumn clearing fires hung like a yellow haze in the air. It was a day that seemed to menace—to portend.

As he walked along the length of the wharf, Lars saw Ingrid Jorgenson approaching. The girl's face was white and frightened. He wondered how she had won past the gate. Perhaps she had used Karl's keys.

He wished that he might have slipped away unseen. He couldn't stand to see her in trouble, and he not able to help. He was afraid to be with her—afraid of his weakness—afraid of the sorry figure he must cut before her.

"Lars, I'm in trouble! It's Karl. He's drunk, and he's quarreling with father. Oh, it's terrible! Just a boy, and he comes home to us drunk like this! Lars, can't you do something? Can't you make him stop before it's too late? He's got his master's papers now, and he has so much to look forward to if he'll do the right thing! You used to be able to do anything with him. He's headstrong, but surely he'll listen to you!"

"Not any more," replied Lars, shaking his head. "I've tried, an' he just gives me the laugh an' goes off with young Herrick. He don't respect me any more, Ingrid—that's the answer. He won't listen to me."

The hoarse tooting of a motor horn rang out from the gate, and the owner's son came toward them.

"Seen Karl anywhere? Told him we'd be back in an hour, and he doesn't seem to be about."

The young man's flushed face and slightly thick tongue told their tale.

"He isn't here, Mr. Herrick. I'd have seen him if he'd come to his quarters."

"Go look for him, then! He must be somewhere. I don't want to keep the ladies waiting."

His tone was fretful. He was the kind of drinker who was mean when he was crossed, Lars thought. Ingrid went close to the man.

"Mr. Herrick"—her voice trembled with earnestness—"Karl isn't your kind. He isn't of your class. Please, won't you let him alone? It's breaking my father's heart, the way he's acting. He's only a boy. Please let him alone!"

The man drew himself into a taut line.

"I'm not your brother's guardian, Miss Jorgenson. I'm sure he'd resent your interfering in his affairs. He's a grown man, and he doesn't need a nurse."

"But, Mr. Herrick, he's a fellow that's easily led," Lars put in. "Like his sister says, if you'd let him alone he'd be all right. You've caused a lot of trouble in this family. Don't do that, Mr. Herrick! Those women with you—"

Lars's voice died in his throat.

"You mind your own business! I don't take any back talk from a wharf rat! Criticize me, will you? I've a damned good notion to cram your impudence down your filthy neck!"

Herrick came close to Lars and glared into his face. He was drunk enough to be itching for a fight. His bitter words cut like splintered ice. Lars's face flamed, and he started forward; but when he looked into the contemptuous eyes of the other man, his gaze weakened and fell. He felt a chill weight of fear that crushed his anger.

He couldn't fight this overbearing fellow. He couldn't even try. He couldn't stand the thought of being hurt. He had suffered so much pain that he couldn't bear any more. He felt a wave of physical illness sweep him. Oh, to be a man again—to be able to wipe up the wharf with this insolent young waster!

He wished that he might be in some quiet, dark place where he could hide his face. He knew that he cut a sorry figure. He knew that Greg Herrick was sneering at his cowardice. He hated Ingrid and the man because they saw his shame.

He leaned weakly against the rough wall of the warehouse. Dazedly he heard Herrick's steps retreating, and then Ingrid's soft footfalls. He knew that he was crying weakly. Tears that seemed to seep their cruel way from the depths of his soul burned along his cheeks. He pressed his face so closely against the gray boards that splinters tore at his flesh, but he seemed not to know. The red glow of the dying sunset shone down on the bowed figure that was twisted in an agony of grief.

IV

THE afterglow was almost gone when he stumbled up the plank at the side of the Eastern Dawn. His footsteps dragged along the smudgy deck that once had been so white. His dull eyes strayed to the dismantled masts, the confusion of the piled canvas, the rotting rigging. He slid back the hatch cover and unlatched the low door that led down the ladder into the cabin.

A musty smell, mixed with the stench of bilge, came to his nostrils. Already the taint of death was upon the old vessel. The cabin showed the ravages of disuse. She had been the finest ship of her day, the Eastern Dawn, but now the red plush of the built-in settees was soiled and torn, and coils of tarry rope sprawled about. A workman, dismantling, had set a can of grease on the red felt of the table cover, and a shiny black blob of it had oozed down and left its trail along the worn carpet that once had been gay with baskets of crimson roses. The brass hanging lamp that swung from the low ceiling was dull and blackened. A few old magazines and newspapers were scattered about, and the three prints on the walls were yellow behind their dingy glasses.

Lars's eyes rested dully on the disorder that met his gaze. Through the open door of the galley he could glimpse the rusty sink that was piled with dirty dishes. In his father's cabin, where he slept, the blanket sheets were rumpled and soiled, the ports were clouded with dust, the bedraggled curtains hung limply. A fine place for a man to have to spend his days and nights—a fine home!

He tossed his cap upon a shelf and slouched toward the captain's cabin. As he passed the crazy bit of mirror that hung beside the washstand, he pulled up sharply. Why, say, the bum who stared back at him couldn't be himself!

He raised his hand and touched the two days' growth of beard on his chin. He hadn't shaved since yesterday morning. His shirt was dirty, too. Dirty! No wonder that young drunk had called him filthy, and a wharf rat! Say, look at the mess he was living in!

Well, with only one useful hand, a fellow couldn't be expected to keep things shipshape. Oh, couldn't he, though? The fact that a man was a cripple was no reason why he should let himself get like a pig. A sailorman ought to be neat. Dad would never have let himself get into this state—not in a thousand years!

No more filth like this for a captain's son! He had been in some sort of bad dream, he guessed. He was going to snap out of it!

As he started the fire in the rusty stove, and set buckets of water to boil, he caught himself thinking of the doctor's words:

"It's nine-tenths up to you."

Nine-tenths up to him! Might it be that he could use his arm a little? Perhaps, if he tried. Lately he had been able to move his fingers and to hold things with his hand. As he scoured and scrubbed, he tried to make the helpless arm do some of the work. The effort wasn't very successful this time, but perhaps, gradually, it would come.

When the cabin was shipshape, he lit the lamp and brought out the text books on electricity that he had found at the library. He had to learn a trade of some sort, and he had thought that a knowledge of electricity might be of help. He hadn't had the heart to open the books before to-night. He wished he could forget about the sea and ships. He wished he could forget about Ingrid—little Ingrid with the pale gold hair—so sweet, so dear, she was! His eyes dulled with pain.

He went to the port, and watched the blackness creep across the oily gray of the lake. The night came on starless and dull. The lights across the water shone but faintly through the smoky haze.

As he stood there, he lived again the humiliation of the afternoon. What was the use of trying to be anything worth

while, when he had permitted such a man as young Herrick to flaunt his cowardice, to shame him before Ingrid?

Suddenly he stiffened. It was coming—this thing that was never far from him. He turned swiftly to face the empty room. The hair on the back of his neck rose. His blood seemed to flow more slowly, with the burden of icy particles that clogged and weighed down his heart. He caught himself stilling his very breathing. He was afraid—horribly afraid!

Not that there was anything that could be seen. Not that there was anything real in the room. He knew that there was not; and yet, day by day, for weeks and months, he had known this nightly terror when the shadows came and the day was gone. It had wrapped him about like a smothering cloud. It was stealing his mind. It was finishing the havoc that his injury had already wrought. With all his tired soul he wished that he might be given the courage to end his tortured existence; and yet he knew that he was afraid to do even that.

From above he heard quick footsteps along the deck. He felt the tension break and relief come to him. It was good to know that some one was about. He wondered who it might be. He was surprised to see Goodman, the superintendent, come down the ladder.

Goodman was a small, alert man with shrewd eyes and a kind mouth. He appeared excited.

"Great news for you, Mr. Erickson—great news!" He tossed his hat upon the table, and glanced about the neat cabin with approving eyes. "Been cleaning up, eh? Fine business! Well, sir, here's the greatest news you've ever heard—just came through by wire from the head office in Frisco. The war over in Europe has tied up shipping so that we're going to have to put everything we own back into commission—even the sailing ships. The Eastern Dawn is going back, sir. This very afternoon Mr. Herrick, the president, decided that no one was better fitted to command her than Cap'n Erickson's son!"

Lars stood quietly. His eyes looked straight across the cabin. He seemed to see his father standing there.

"You know what the captain thought of this ship, sir, and we know what you think of her, too," continued the superintendent. She was your home from your childhood. You learned your seamanship on her. We are happy to know that you will take her out again."

"But—I—can't do it!"

Lars's voice was flat and toneless. His eyes looked deep into his father's for an instant, to see a hurt, disappointed, old man. Then the phantom of his mind's making was gone.

"I can't take her out, I can't take her out," he repeated monotonously.

"Nonsense! I suppose you are thinking of your—er—injury. If we have confidence in you, Mr. Erickson, surely you have faith in yourself? Mr. Herrick talked to the doctors after you came out of the hospital. They told him, as they probably told you, that it was only a matter of getting hold of yourself again—a matter of nerves. You know that your father was our oldest master. He was loyal to us always, and now we need his son. Surely you will not fail us?"

"There are other men—real men—"

Goodman walked the floor impatiently.

"Everything that floats on this coast is being put into commission. Able commanders — dependable men — are scarce. Few but the old-timers can handle a clipper with much success. You've had invaluable training with your father. You have your papers. Mr. Herrick needs you, Mr. Erickson. The Eastern Dawn will be put into shape at once, to carry lumber to Australia."

"I can't take her out!" He couldn't—he was afraid. He couldn't handle the men, and the thought of a storm sent him cringing inwardly.

Goodman stared at him for a moment before speaking again.

"Very well, then—young Jorgenson will have to take your place. He has just secured his papers, and no one else is available. He's a good man, as far as seamanship goes, but we have our doubts about him in command. He's too headstrong, and lately—well—"

"Karl's a good sailor, sir," said Lars, trying to be fair.

"Too young for command, Mr. Erickson—too unseasoned. You're not much older, I know, but you're steadier, and that's what counts. Well, I suppose there's nothing more to say. Good night! I think you're making a mistake — a very great mistake."

He was gone.

Lars stood by the table in the desolate cabin. His father's ship—she was going out to sea again! Karl was going to take his father's ship out to sea! Somehow, he hated the thought. Karl in his father's place—Karl at the wheel of the Eastern Dawn—Karl in command of the ship that the careless young sailor had called an old bucket of junk!

As if from far away, Lars heard the words that old Willum had carried to him—his father's words:

"Tell him I'm proud of him, and I'll be watching when he takes his first ship out. I'll always be watching and knowing that he's going on."

Without a sound, he slipped down to his knees and buried his white young face in the crook of his arm. First little Ingrid, and now the Eastern Dawn and all his father's dreams—all gone, and he—lonely and afraid!

V

THE gray wharves hummed with life in the days that followed. One by one the old ships sailed away through the canal, until only the Eastern Dawn and the ancient Lady Tafton, whose rotting hull was too far gone to recommission, lay alongside the dock.

Lars had moved to the cabin of the Tafton, to stay on there as watchman of the wharves. Karl, as master, now lived in the cabin of the Eastern Dawn. The thought of him in command was always a thorn in the heart of Lars, who could never accustom himself to the idea.

He toiled all day, with the other workmen, putting the ship into sailing trim once more. It was a labor of love to the crippled youth. Each day, too, he found himself using his arm a little more easily. Hard work was good, but when night came he found the old fear stealing in. He had no hope that he would ever banish it.

Lars seldom came near the new captain, and, when he did, the boy was always with young Herrick. Once, when Lars had tried to talk to him, there had been ugly words. Karl and Greg Herrick were not drinking now, however. The black-eyed girl and her companion still waited beyond the gates in the red sedan, but the two young men were attending to business most of the time.

Old Mr. Herrick, in a final effort to interest his son in something worth while, had given him the Eastern Dawn for his own. Karl seemed to be keen about the ship and her cargo. She was under the company's management, but young Herrick spent many hours of each day aboard her. It was not unnatural that the captain and the owner should be constantly together.

Late one afternoon, when the last of the work was completed and the new crew was aboard the Eastern Dawn, Lars finished his final task and stood on the wharf for his farewell. To-morrow at daybreak she was to sail. She was bright with fresh paint, and yellow ropes, and furled new sails that would curve out joyously when the trade winds blew a welcome back to the open sea.

The young man gazed up lovingly at the smiling figurehead, with its folded hands and its carven draperies that seemed even then to be whipping in the salt sprayed breeze. Every atom of him longed to be taking the old vessel out, to feel the swaying deck beneath his feet, to hear the whine of the trades in the rigging, to catch a whiff of coffee and the cooking supper from the galley, to hear the wheelman's gruff—

"Sou' sou'west it is, sir!"

It was a yearning that was agony. Sadly Lars made his way aboard the Lady Tafton and into his cheerless cabin. The nights were damp and chill now. He lighted the brass lamp against the wall and sank into a chair, his head lowered, his hands hanging listlessly at his sides. To-morrow the last bit of his old life would be gone, and only sad memories and cruel fear would be here.

How long he sat there he did not know. A fumbling at the latch of the cabin door aroused him. He jumped nervously to his feet and faced the entrance. It was dim in the lamplight, but when the door swung back he saw Ingrid standing there. She paused like a white wraith, the fragrance of crushed violets seemed to float into the cabin, and then she came forward slowly.

"I couldn't bear to think of you here alone to-night, Lars. I know you'll be sad to see the ship sail without you."

He nodded slowly.

"Yes—I couldn't go. I'll have to make the best of it, I guess."

Ingrid came closer and stood near the table.

"I haven't seen you in so long!"

Her eyes were fastened on his face. He wanted to tell her how he had missed her, how he loved her—to tell her all the things that were in his heart; but he could not.

He stood stolidly there, as if he didn't care. *Didn't care,* when he was dying by inches for her and for his ship? Heavens, if she only knew!

"Aren't you ever going to be friends with me again, Lars? Oh, why do you treat me so badly?" The blue eyes were swimming with tears. Why did she look at him like that? Somehow those eyes, for all that they were so clear, made him feel that they had known many tears since he had seen them last. "I'm not happy any more," the girl went on. There was a catch in her voice. "You won't be friends with me, and Karl—oh, Lars, I'm so worried about Karl!"

"Why, he's sobered down lately, it seems," replied Lars. "He'll be all steadied down when he gets to sea."

"I—I don't know. I feel there's something wrong. He's changed, somehow. His drinking was bad enough, but this—yesterday I came down to the wharf. They didn't hear me when I was coming up to them, and I heard Karl say something to young Herrick—something that's frightened me terribly. There's something going on—oh, I can't even put it into words, it frightens me so!"

Her face was piteous. He leaned forward and caught her hands with both of his. For a passing instant the old ardent Lars seemed to be there.

"Your hands—Lars, you can use your arm!" cried Ingrid, her voice thrilling with sudden gladness.

"A little. I've been trying for weeks, and it's coming back slowly."

He had dropped her hands, and the flat tone was in his voice again. Ingrid's eyes were shining. She slipped around the table and caught at his shoulders.

"Oh, Lars, I'm so happy! Oh, my dear, my dear!"

A low laugh sounded from the doorway, and they swung about to face Karl.

"Two lil love birds made up their quarrel? Well, thanks be for that! Now maybe ol' Lars won't go around like a bear with a sore head, and Ingrid won't nag all the time! Terrible when a fellow gets nothin' but naggin' from his friends and his folks—terrible!"

He was drunk enough for it to be noticeable. He came into the cabin.

"Saw your light, ol' fellow, and just came in for farewell drink. Might ask me to take off my hat! Brought my own liquor, too. Le's all be sociable on my last night, eh? Le's all sing!"

He threw back his head and showed all his even white teeth as he roared out:

"It was forty-seven bells by the Waterbury watch,
Yo-ho, me lads, yo-ho!
And the skipper was full of good ol' Scotch,
And the crew was down below,
Yo-ho!
And the crew was down below!"

He threw himself into a rickety chair that creaked with his weight, and burst into a gale of laughter.

"You look so damn stupid, standin' there like a couple of ol' owls! Come on, be good fellows! Be nice to a guy that's had a fight with his sweety—nice, black-eyed sweety! Poor fellow's last night in port, too! Fine way to treat him because he won't tell her a secret! Fellow got to keep this secret, or we'll both go to jail, young Herrick says. I've told little black-eyed Nina I'll be home sooner than she thinks, with lots of coin for her, but she gets mad 'cause I won't tell why." Tears were flowing down his cheeks as he recounted his troubles. "Sis'er and bes' friend nag me all the time," he went on. "Bes' girl mad 'cause I won't tell her secret! Hell of a world, and me captain of an ol' bucket o' scrap! C'me on, le's have a drink! Le's drink to my quick return!"

Ingrid's fingers were biting into Lars. He saw her force a smile to her white lips. She swung herself down into a chair across the table from her brother.

"Sure we'll drink with you, boy! Say, we're sorry for the way we've nagged. Lars and I've made up our quarrel. Let's drink to that, and to your quick return!" Her eyes were narrowed, watching her brother's every expression. She motioned from under the table for Lars to go back into the shadows. "But I don't believe you'll be back soon. You're trying to fool your sister about that. You don't love her enough to tell her why you think you'll be coming back soon!"

Karl swallowed a stiff drink and leaned forward earnestly. He was not very drunk—just at the talkative and emotional stage.

"Sure love my sis'er, but don't dare tell. Go to the pen, young Herrick says—disgrace ol' family, if I ever tell. Won't even tell lil black-eyed Nina. I'll give her lots of money when I come, an' she won't care, but she shouldn't fight with me on las' night in port!"

" And me, Karl—your sister that loves you—will you give me lots of money, too?"

" Y-e-e-s, indeed! Y-e-e-s, lots o' coin! Young Herrick owns ol' tub now. Lots of insurance money—give my lil sis'er lots of insurance money for ol' tub!"

Lars felt a sudden light flood his mind. Ingrid's fear—the intimacy between young Herrick and this weak boy—the black-eyed girl—Karl's drunken words—he saw what all these meant.

" You mean "—Ingrid was whispering, but he could hear each sibilant sound—" to sink the old tub!"

Karl's face took on a sudden sternness. He hadn't been as drunk as they'd thought.

" I never said so!" he cried, steadying his voice with an effort.

" You don't have to tell me!" Ingrid was leaning over the table. Her voice had risen. " You've turned into everything that's rotten vile! You've disappointed our father, and you've made me sick for the drunken thing you've become; and now, when they're sending you out with your first command, you're proving a traitor to the company's trust in you!"

" That's not the company's ship now," Karl replied sullenly.

" No, it's young Herrick's, and you've let him make a drunkard and now a criminal out of you. Oh, I know what you're planning! You've let out enough. He's in need of money. I know his father has tried to make something decent out of him, and has put a stop to his spending. He's taken out a big insurance, I suppose, and you'll sink the Eastern Dawn and take your share of the money that's earned with dishonor. Oh, Karl! To think that my brother—"

" You mind your own business, you hear me!" cried Karl angrily.

His eyes were blazing with anger. He towered over the girl.

" I'm going to tell Mr. Herrick—the old man—what you two are planning," she said firmly.

Karl caught her roughly by the arms.

" Like hell you will! Now you listen—I'm goin' to the old tub. The crew's aboard, and we'll sail when I say. I'm goin' through with what I agreed, and I know as well as you do that you won't see me go to the pen. You'll keep your mouth shut, all right!"

" You'll not go out of that door, Karl!" Ingrid's voice was low. Her blue eyes blazed back into her brother's.

" What's goin' to stop me—you?" he inquired scornfully.

The girl swung toward Lars. Her face was piteous in its appeal, but he cringed at the far side of the room. The chill dread that he knew so well held him in its grip. He knew that Ingrid was silently begging him to interfere.

Karl was laughing aloud—an ugly laugh. Ingrid's denunciation had curdled his good nature to fury.

" You think that poor weak-kneed sister 'll stop me? Why, he hasn't got the gimp to look himself in the face! I don't care if he was my friend—he's a low-down quitter! Nothin' the matter with him but he's too much of a lazy coward to earn his salt. If it wasn't for his dad being with 'em so long, young Herrick says they wouldn't have him around the place. A water front bum—that's what he is! Because I'm going to be a business man that looks out for himself, you're goin' to sick that jellyfish onto me, eh? You make me laugh!"

Lars knew that he should resent words so insulting to Ingrid, and so insulting to himself. He had had influence with this headstrong youngster once. He had mastered him because he had licked the boy; but now—he couldn't stand the thought of being hurt. Karl was ugly drunk. He would fight. He would strike out with those big fists. He would hurt Lars—would hurt him cruelly!

For a moment Karl and the girl stared at Lars in silence. There was cold pity in her eyes, sneering contempt in Karl's.

Lars heard his own voice coming through stiff lips:

" Karl, you can't do this thing. Tell Ingrid she's mistaken. Surely—the Eastern Dawn—why, Karl, you couldn't—"

" Oh, you're both crazy! That old tub! What difference does it make? What if she sinks out beyond the cape on a fair night? I'll say her rotten seams opened, and she went to the bottom. You'll keep your mouths shut—hear me? You tell a word, you Lars Erickson "—he had worked himself into a frenzy—" and I'll whip you within an inch of your meechin' life! I'm tired of you two trying to run me. You keep out of my affairs!"

Lars felt the ice in his blood melt and surge into a hot feeling of fury. The Eastern Dawn betrayed by this youth! The stanch old ship—his father's ship—made

to seem that she had been unworthy of her trust! He faced Karl squarely.

"You don't go out of this room till you've given me your word you won't do this thing! You crook, you'd sink the Eastern Dawn?"

Two hands shot out and caught him around the throat. He was helpless, shaken, thrown across the room. Karl towered in the faint light of the lamp, as he swayed a little on wide-set feet. For a time his heavy breathing was all that broke the silence.

Lars was cold with fear, shaken with an ague of it. From where he crouched his frightened eyes stared across to Ingrid's. She had thrown herself before the door, her widespread arms guarding it. With a sudden movement, Karl tried to brush her away, but she clung to the knob of the door. Her face held sidewise, her eyes seemed to be begging Lars—begging him. Her brother, whom she adored—she could not let him go out to dishonor!

Lars pulled himself to his feet. Karl caught the movement. Something in the decision of it seemed to warn him. With his head lowered a little, he waited, tensed.

Against the cabin wall Lars stood dazedly. Tears that burned like acid slipped along his cheeks. He was trying to forget those tearing fists. No matter what happened, he wasn't going to let this mad youth betray and destroy the Eastern Dawn. In a passing instant he felt as if he were marshaling great forces—as if his father stood there beside him. In his mind rang the words:

"It's nine-tenths up to you."

He did not move, but with all his will, with all his soul, the struggle raged within. Great beads of sweat started out on his twisted face.

A moan came from Ingrid as she crouched there by the door. It rang in his ears—it tore at his heart—it plunged into the very core of him, and sent a great wave surging upward. With a cry of triumph, he straightened his young shoulders to meet the sudden rush of the other man.

He knew red clouds of madness—knew that he hammered savage blows into the face before him. He knew a sweeping flood of exultation as his fists smacked home. He took the heavy thuds that rained on him. He gloried in them, and fought the harder—for Ingrid, for the captain, for the Eastern Dawn.

In that scarlet space he saw the young face that he loved slowly change to a thing that had no human semblance. He was beating the boy terribly—but it was for Karl, too, that he was fighting. At last he heard a heavy grunt, and saw the boy reel, crash into the wall with high-flung arms, and sink into a clumsy, whimpering heap.

Lars stood swaying drunkenly, his heart singing a mighty battle song that soared and rang. He had struck Karl with his right arm—he had laid that strapping youngster cold with his right arm! He wasn't afraid of anything in the world—he wasn't afraid of anything—he wasn't *afraid!*

VI

After a space his triumphant eyes turned to Ingrid. She still crouched by the door. At first she stared at him with the dull gaze of one who does not understand; but gradually he saw wonder, and then a great gladness, born in her wide eyes. He strode across and caught her up as if she were a little child. She lay quietly in his arms, but her pitying gaze turned toward the huddled form of her brother.

"It was best, dear. He's not badly hurt. Better to let him alone for awhile," Lars told her.

Holding her closely, he went out of the door and up the few steps to the deck. There an open-mouthed Goodman faced them. Lars's shirt was ripped from his body, his eyes were swollen, his mouth bled stickily and dripped down to his wet throat and chest; but through the bruises and the blood a great happiness shone out like a blinding light. His was the face of a man who had come out of the toils—a man who had conquered!

"Mr. Goodman, sir"—the words came through swelling lips, but they rang with a new strength—"at daybreak I will take out the Eastern Dawn. Mr. Jorgenson—well, he'll not be able to take command. He will sail with me as mate. Could I ask you to have him put aboard? You'll find him here in the cabin."

His eyes rested on the golden head that lay so quietly against his shoulder.

"Mr. Goodman," he went on, "you'd be doing me a great favor if you'd phone for the pastor to come to the greenhouse on the hill. You see, sir, Ingrid an' me—we're goin' to be married to-night."

Blankets

SOME ARE WHIPPED OUT IN THE SUN AND THE WIND, AND SOME ARE FOLDED AWAY TO BE BORED THROUGH BY WORMS

By Mella Russell McCallum

THE bungalow was waxily clean. The shades were drawn to a genteel length, and the veranda was washed, cool, inviting, behind its screening vines. Even the row of hollyhocks looked washed —as, indeed, they were. Amy had turned the hose on them that morning, to remove the webby condition caused by the June heat.

There was no better housekeeper in Belleville than Amy, and there was no woman in Belleville more unhappy.

Now, house and yard in order, she was making a strawberry pie. It would be a good pie. Cora would say, " Um-m!" over its melting crusts. Cora would come as near smacking her lips as the principal of the school may come.

" Cora's too fond of desserts. She's too fat!"

Thus ran a thought in the upper, inconsequential stratum of Amy's mind. In the lower stratum ran dark thoughts, eating, boring thoughts, like moth worms working through a folded blanket.

" She's giving me a vacation," bored the moth. " Me, who wronged her, who ruined her life for her. She's sending me to the mountains with the money she saved up to go to Europe on—me!"

The pie progressed under her reddened, efficient fingers. Eleven o'clock! It would be properly baked and cooled for dinner. No one managed all these things better than Amy. Every one said that Cora was lucky to have her widowed sister to keep house for her.

The potatoes were bubbling, the ham sliced, the lettuce arranged, the table set. The pie was steaming itself cool. Ten minutes before Cora would come!

Amy flung herself into the kitchen chair and bowed her sleek, dark head upon the worktable.

" Oh, God, I can't stand it!" Her knuckles beat a fierce tattoo. " Giving up her trip to Europe for me!"

As she went on preparing the dinner, her black eyes were a little wild, and a loop of hair drooped over her forehead.

Cora's strong step sounded at five minutes past twelve. It was the signal to put ice in the glasses.

" Hello, Amy!"

Every school day that loud, even call rang through the house at noon.

" Hello, Cora! Dinner's all ready."

Seated opposite each other, they were as terrier and mastiff. Cora did the serving, largely and leisurely.

" Don't give me all that potato, Cora!"

" You ought to eat more. Get some meat on your bones, and you won't be so nervous."

" I'm perfectly well. It isn't natural for me to eat much."

Cora looked up quickly. She had a habit of quick looking, as her pupils could tell you. Amy twitched under the calm, gray glance.

" You been having another nervous spell?"

" Not bad, Cora. I'm all right."

" Well, I'll be glad when you're off. I've engaged your room at Lakewood Inn beginning next week."

" I wish you hadn't!"

" Why not? Sooner the better. And listen—you meet me at the Boston store after school to-day. I want you to have one of those black and white sweaters they've got in, and a pair of nice, heavy

Oxfords. You'll meet nice people up there, and walk out a lot."

Amy nodded, and went on picking at her food. There was a fierce, dry look in her eyes.

Cora remarked about the pie.

"I'd love another piece," she sighed.

"Have it, Cora. Enjoy your food."

"No!" Cora rose resolutely. "I've got to start to reduce."

Before Cora went back to school, they read the morning paper in the living room. Cora gave Amy the news section first, while she read the inside; then they exchanged. Then Cora rose and said:

"Must go."

Amy looked out between the ruffled Swiss curtains at the comfortable figure walking up the street. She gave a little indrawn shriek.

"God in heaven! Buying me a lot of new clothes, sending me to a lovely place in the mountains!"

She twisted her arms above her head, and then bent her body double in a spasm of grief.

The next moment, pale and spent, she began to clear the dinner table.

II

At a quarter past three Amy met her sister in the Boston store, and tried on a sweater.

"I declare, it sure becomes you, Mrs. Woolly," insisted the elderly clerk.

They bought the stout Oxfords, too, and a new umbrella with a carved bird's head handle; and Cora insisted on a new traveling bag, real cowhide. She ignored Amy's fierce, whispered protests.

As they left the store, Cora suggested that they should have ice cream soda.

"It's so hot," she said.

She drank her own, and the last half of Amy's. There were no school pupils in the ice cream parlor to witness this undignified performance.

When they reached home, Cora began at once to correct examination papers. Amy went to her room to rest; but she did not rest. She took the new sweater out of its paper and put it on a hanger. She untied the new shoes and placed them on the low closet shelf, with her other shoes. She set the umbrella with the carved bird's head in the corner. Nice things, nice things!

She changed her street dress for the blue kimono that had been one of Cora's Christmas gifts, and lay down, her arms rigid.

"Her money, that she saved to go to Europe with! Me, not fit to tie her shoe!"

Through and through, the moth worm boring.

At half past five she put on the gray flowered voile that had been last summer's best dress, and tied a little ruffled apron around her waist.

"I'll make French toast for supper. Cora's fond of it."

Cora was singing now—a sign that her school work was done. The deep contralto that boomed through the chapel exercises at school completely filled the little bungalow; but Cora was not singing a chapel song. Cora was frivolously intoning:

> "I wonder what's become of Sa-a-lly,
> That old girl of mi-i-ne!"

The unclouded notes shattered their way through Amy. She prepared the toast, a golden mound on a blue platter. She made two cups of coffee. Cora liked an excuse for coffee twice a day, and it seemed to belong with French toast.

The supper table was laid with the blue tea set. Amy cut a few stalks of larkspur and put them in the center.

Cora had changed her school serge for a thin gown of black and white stripes that billowed out around her. Her eyes rested with approval on the larkspur.

"You feed my soul, too," she told Amy.

Amy breathed quickly.

"Don't give me only one piece of toast."

"Oh, go on, goosie! Feed up."

"I'm not hungry, really."

Again Cora shot one of her quick glances at her sister.

"Why not?" she asked.

"It isn't my nature," replied Amy.

Cora sighed. There was a small silence.

"I've been thinking there's no reason why you shouldn't have a dinner dress, too," Cora spoke up thoughtfully. "They have dinner at night up there. Now a soft gray something, with lace sleeves—"

"Cora! I don't want to go!"

The currents in the room seemed to back up on each other, and stand quivering. Cora's lips met firmly. Amy's eyes blazed out of caverns.

"Nonsense! It's all settled."

"I don't want to go! I—I've got something to tell you."

"Now, Amy, hold on to your nerves!"

"I've got something to say—and then I'll take myself off somewhere — I won't trouble you—"

"Amy, hush!"

"*I took Winston away from you!*"

Cora sat perfectly still, her large face not changing; but a delicate shadow colored it.

"What poppycock, Amy!"

"But I did, I tell you! I set about it deliberately, to get him away from you!" Amy had rehearsed the words so many times that they rolled out smoothly. "I was jealous because you were engaged and I wasn't."

"Will you please pass the brown sugar? I like it better than sirup on French toast."

"I used a trick to get him!"

Cora's chair moved harshly, crumpling the rug.

"Start your packing to-night, Amy. I'm going to wire the inn that you're coming to-morrow. Why, your nerves are raw!"

"It was a trick that I learned from a common person — from Lutie, that black-haired hired girl we had. I used to hide behind the haystack, and watch her meet her beau."

Cora had risen, and was leaving the room. Amy sprang at her with wire fingers.

"You've got to listen to me! I've been twenty years telling you!"

Like a large, unwilling, distressed rock, Cora stood still.

"I watched how Lutie flung her head back, so that the moonlight got into her eyes, and how she laughed, sort of light, but deep, too, like the brook sounds when it gets near the whirlpool! I heard her beau say, 'God, girl, your eyes got fires in them!' And I said to myself—"

"Amy, I won't permit this low talk!"

"I know it's low, but I was low, I tell you! I said, 'I can do that to a man, too!' I practiced before the glass, and the next time Winston came to see you—"

The rock shivered in the wire clasp.

"You were correcting examination papers. It was June, same as now. 'Take Winston out and show him the rose garden by moonlight,' you said, and—*oh, my God, Cora!*" Amy went down on her knees, straining her arms up around Cora. "And the next day he told you he'd made a mistake, and that it was me he loved, not you. You took it so quiet and sweet! Oh, God, he never loved me! It was really you all the time. He never let me forget it. Even on his dying day he said it was you!"

The wire tenseness was suddenly gone. Amy got up.

"I've told you," she said dully. "I've been twenty years doing it. Now you know what I am. I'm going back to Webb City. I can get work in the dressmaking shop there."

"Don't be silly," said the rock. "Come here!"

How calm Cora's breast felt! They were as ten and fourteen, little Amy and her big sister.

"There, now, that mountain air will fix you."

Cora patted Amy.

After several moments they moved away from each other.

"What do you say to our having a bit of ice cream for dessert, and a fresh cup of coffee?"

Cora spoke with the studied unconsciousness of the stout person who knows that she ought not to eat any more.

"I'll make up some coffee while you get the cream, Cora. I could relish another cup myself."

Amy cleared away the blue dishes and put on the tiny percolator again. She cut three slices of fruit cake—one for herself, two for Cora.

"Cora ought not to eat so much sweet stuff. She's too fat," ran the upper stratum of thought.

"I've told her," said the lower stratum. "After twenty years, I've told her, and all she said was 'What do you say to our having a bit of ice cream?'"

III

Amy sat in the kitchen chair and waited for Cora to bring the cream. The percolator made little mad blub-blubs. She had told Cora, and Cora had replied by suggesting ice cream for dessert. What did Cora *think?*

Cora's strong step sounded.

"Neapolitan brick, Amy! And kind of soft—have to eat it quick!"

Amy bustled with dessert plates. They faced each other again across the larkspur.

Cora sniffed enjoyably.

"How good that coffee smells!"

Then Amy burst forth:

"How can you go on this way, as if nothing had happened?"

Cora scooped a slow spoonful of ice cream. Her eyes met Amy's squarely, and she spoke slowly.

"Do you think my life was spoiled because I didn't get Winston Woolly?" she said. "A man that could be turned by a pair of play-acting eyes! It must be all of nineteen years since he came whining to me about how you'd enticed him—"

Cora stopped, and her eyes suddenly became opaque.

So! Amy poured a few drops of cream into her coffee. So Cora had known all along! How strange! Cora had known, and had kept her own counsel all these years—these years while the moth worms had been eating.

Suddenly Amy knew the truth. It was not Cora who had been cheated in life—it was she!

The years lay behind her like the folds of a blanket—a beautiful white blanket once, but now yellowed, close-smelling, bored through and through by the worms of remorse.

Cora's life was a blanket, too. Cora had kept her blanket fresh, had flung it in the air. Some time it would become whipped out by the sun and the wind, but it would never be moth-eaten.

"Cora!" There was a new excitement in the exclamation. "I'm not going to the mountains!"

Cora laid down her spoon, as if to say: "What next?"

"I'm not! You're going to take that trip to Europe. It isn't too late for you to join those teacher friends of yours. I'm going to stay right here—right here!—and keep your house in order, and see if I can't find a corner of my blanket that's firm enough to—"

"What on earth are you talking about now?"

Amy laughed happily.

"You can change the sweater and the shoes for bigger ones, and keep the bag and umbrella—"

"But, child, your nerves—"

"My nerves 'll get well here. I'll get hold of myself. I've been—under kind of a strain—for a long time!"

Cora looked thoughtful. When she answered, it was with the quick decision of the school principal.

"I believe you're right," she said. "I'll go, Amy!"

The currents in the room that had backed up on each other were flowing smoothly now. Amy passed the cake to Cora.

"I ought not to eat cake."

"Oh, take a piece, Cora! Enjoy your food."

"Well, just this small piece." Cora grinned. "To-morrow I've got to start reducing!"

ABSENT

I WONDER where you fare this darkling night,
With little winds that whisper of the years
When you would waken, sobbing for the light,
And I would come to dry your baby tears?

Then you would sleep again upon my breast,
My arms about my man that was to be.
What shore to-night affords my darling rest,
Or what far cradle of the rocking sea?

Beneath the wind the waters come and go,
And who can chart the drifting of the wind—
Those unseen currents which forever blow
For men to follow with no look behind?

The rain is tapping at the window pane;
I hear a whisper in the sodden tree,
The ghost of dim, sweet laughter in the lane—
A wee white shade is at his mother's knee!

Olin Lyman

Some Fine Day

A STORY WHICH DEMONSTRATES ONCE MORE THAT THERE IS SOME GOOD IN THE WORST OF US

By Myron Brinig

THERE were people in Silver Bow who remembered Abe Zollman, the pawnbroker, when he was a sweet-natured young fellow, passionately in love with his wife, Rebecca. They had been married in Roumania, where they had dwelt on adjoining vineyards; but when Abe arrived in America, he was eager to make money, and opened a pawnshop, the first in Silver Bow.

The new environment did not agree with Rebecca. The smoke and sulphur from the mines and smelters caused the roses in her cheeks to wither, and dulled the animation of her laughing eyes. She died in giving birth to a child, which did not long survive her; and when Abe Zollman looked down on her shrunken, aloof body, forever to be imprisoned within the black, sinister box of a coffin, he wondered what can be the use of being an honest man, if all your happiness is turned to dust before your eyes.

Now, after twenty years, Abe was an old man. The virility and the beauty of his young manhood had turned sere and yellow and embittered. When charity seekers came into his pawnshop to ask money for some poor wretch who had escaped the pogroms in the Ukraine, or for the Consumptives' Hospital in Denver, Abe would sneer at their pleas and insult them.

"Why you come to me?" he would ask scornfully. "Behind my back you call me a *gozzlin,* a devil. You say as how I do business with thieves. You call me a miser, and you say my dollars will wear out before I spend one from them; so I answer you, get out from my place of business! I will not give a nickel to a God what has taken all joy from my life—a God what robbed me from my wife and child!"

Those who came to Abe Zollman's pawnshop in search of charity left his door with the feeling that here indeed was a human devil, a man so embittered, so lost to kindness, that not even a dog, the most submissive of all animals, would live with him.

To one who passed Abe's pawnshop three or four times during the course of the day, it was a wonder how he managed to earn a living. There never seemed to be a soul inside the shop except the proprietor himself, and he was so shrunken and stale-looking as to appear less human than one of his articles of merchandise. The fact was that Abe Zollman did not depend upon a regular, legitimate business to earn a livelihood. His trade was almost entirely with thieves of various degrees, tricksters, and blackmailers.

It was at night, after he had locked his front door, that his real source of income started. In a small room, which one reached by means of stairs leading up to a balcony, the pawnbroker received and examined the loot that Flashlight Ted, Red Annie, and others of the underworld fraternity brought to him for sale.

It was strange that Abe Zollman, the former ascetic, a man well read in the Talmud and other books of Hebrew learning, should have descended, in the space of a few years, to this lowest of levels—a receiver of stolen goods. The explanation of the change lay in the fact that the pawnbroker had lost all respect for his religion when his wife and child died. Once free from the grand awe of Jehovah and the Ten Commandments, he allowed himself to drift away from the beliefs of his forefathers. When he should have been in the synagogue raising his deep, melodious voice in lamentation, he was in unholy conference with thieves, hop peddlers, and touts. There is an old Hebrew saying:

"If thy love be taken from thee, attempt not to console thyself with gold."

If Abe Zollman remembered this maxim, he buried it under the cynicism of years.

Red Annie was perhaps the most versatile of Abe's clients. She had brought a fortune in stolen jewels to the pawnshop—diamonds, pearls, and rubies wrested from the careless rich, all the way from Silver Bow to San Francisco. To-day Red Annie might be in Silver Bow with rare, precious jewels; to-morrow she would be gone, and Abe would not see her again for six months or more. The pawnbroker was certain of her ultimate return. He knew that she trusted him as she trusted no other pawnbroker in the West. He had always been square with her. Indeed, he had treated her generously, even while turning a pretty profit to his own account.

To-night, in Abe Zollman's pawnshop, a strange premonition of disaster hung over Red Annie. Quite suddenly she seemed to have lost her nerve. She had seen men who looked like detectives observing her from a distance; and the evening before she had returned to her home on Platinum Street to find the rooms in disorder, as if some one had been searching the premises. It might have been only the woman who came in twice a week to do the cleaning and laundry; but Red Annie was frightened.

"I'm going away to-morrow," she told Abe. "I'm going to Frisco, an' something tells me I ain't never coming back."

"Don't you be so foolish, Annie," Abe soothed her. "Ain't you told me as how one from them gypsies did say to you, 'Never will you be behind bars, Annie. Always you will be free'?"

"Yaa, but the gypsy was drunk," whispered Annie. "He might 'a' been talking through his hat, for all I know. I'm afraid, Abe. I've been having bad dreams lately. Something seems to tell me—"

And then Red Annie did a most extraordinary thing for her. She broke down and wept.

Abe was left untouched by Annie's tears. He was utterly callous to the springs of remorse that caused them to flow. It had been a long time ago that his wife Rebecca had come to him sobbing out her fears of the future.

"Abe, I'm afraid," she had told him. "*Appis zogt mir* that I will die!"

That was the last time that Abe had ever felt tears in his eyes and his heart. This low woman, this thief, Red Annie—he felt that he could never weep for her.

"Annie, you *schlemeel!*" he said. "Why you cry like a foolish old woman? It ain't like you to act like a cat what is starved."

Annie hastily dried her tears. She was proud of her beauty, and meant to preserve it as long as possible. She was slender, graceful, and not unrefined-looking; and her hair was of that natural, violent red that burns the eyes and the senses. It was this splendid crown of fire that had helped to make Annie so successful a thief. It gave her a strange charm that made it easy to tempt jewels away from rich men—"just to see how I look, deary!" The rich men who let Annie borrow a ring or a pin rarely saw it again.

"Abe, you're a pretty low dog," said Annie; "but you've always played square with me. You're the only pawnbroker I ever knew who wasn't in with the police. So now I'm going to tell you something, Mr. Three-Ball Zollman. I got something to pawn."

"Another diamond, maybe?" asked Abe, his eyes lighting up as if the pupils were illuminated by hidden electric wires.

"Yaa, a diamond, but a gen-u-wine diamond, Abe—a jewel no money could buy. It makes all the other diamonds in the world seem like paste. Abe, I want to pawn my boy—my son!"

Abe observed her as through a cloud of bewilderment, and wondered if long years served at a precarious trade had not finally unbalanced her mind.

"What you mean, Annie—your son?" he grumbled.

"I mean just what I say," she answered bravely, and in that moment Red Annie was beautiful in a soft, gentle way. "Abe, about ten years ago I fell in love with a Frisco guy whose father is one of the big men of California; but you know how it is, Abe. These rich guys always do what papa tells 'em. He wouldn't marry me. I lived with him for awhile, an' then I brought my son here to Silver Bow. Nobody knows about him but you an' the old woman who cleans up my house. I'm going away to-morrow, Abe—"

"If you want me to keep your son, I say no!" interrupted Abe. "I'm a poor man, Annie," he lied.

"I ain't asking for charity, Abe," said Annie contemptuously; "nor I ain't selling my boy, neither. No money could buy him, if it comes to that. I only want to

pawn him till I get back, see? I ain't got the fare to Frisco on me, an' I want you to give me a ticket and a three-hundred-dollar loan on the boy. I'll redeem Phil when I get back. I know you'll treat him decent, Abe, because you take good care of your merchandise. You wouldn't step on a fancy piece of bric-a-brac or a gold watch, an' I know you won't step on my boy. It's business, Abe, you see, an' you're a good business man."

Abe looked at her closely, to see if she was joking. He had seen Red Annie in all her moods, and he knew when she was serious and when mocking. She was serious now, or he had lost his senses; yet Abe hesitated. It might be business, as Red Annie had said, but it was a peculiar and untrustworthy kind of business. A diamond, a fiddle, a watch—Abe knew how to deal with such things; but never before had any one asked him to lend money on a human being.

"How old is he, Annie — your boy, I mean?" he inquired.

"Seven. He was born on the day of the Armistice. Funny, ain't it? Like he was a promise of something better in the world—peace after war, good after evil. Ha, lots of good I am to him! A low-down thief, that's what I am! 'Annie, some fine day you'll be able to do something real decent for your boy,' I keep telling myself; an' then I go right out an' do some mean job I'm ashamed of!"

Abe pondered. He would take the boy and keep him until Annie came back. Why not? She had always returned before, and there was no reason to fear that she would run off and leave the child on his hands indefinitely. It would not cost him much to keep the child during the six months or so that Annie would be gone; and when she came back he would charge the expense to her, and would add a handsome profit. He could probably make at least a hundred and fifty dollars out of the transaction, and there would be fifteen new ten-dollar gold pieces to stow away in his trunk.

"I will take the boy, Annie," he said; "but mind you, my girl, if you're not back in six months' time, out he goes to the Reform School!"

So Annie received her money and her pledge.

"Abe"—Annie drew out a small Bible from her purse, a leather book with a gold cross on its cover—"Abe, I want you to swear on this Bible that you'll be kind to Philip."

Abe snorted, while a malicious amusement shone from his narrow eyes.

"I ain't swearing on that book," he grunted.

"Where's your Old Testament, then?" asked Annie. "Swear on that."

"One's bad like another, Annie. I don't believe in Bibles." He turned to the cash register behind him, and, after ringing up "no sale," drew from the till a silver dollar. Pressing the coin to his lips and lifting his right hand, he swore that he would be kind to Philip, Annie's son.

"Well, you've always been square with me, so what's the difference what you swear on?" asked Annie, and laughed. "I guess you'll treat him halfway decent—as good as you treat a watch or a mouth organ, anyways. Ain't you never had a son of your own, Abe?"

"Don't ask me foolish questions," said Abe gruffly, and walked away from her.

Annie saw that her remark had taken the stamina out of him. When he brought his two hands together in a gesture of profound grief, she felt sorry for him. The look of softness returned to her eyes.

"I'll bring the kid in to-night," she said.

"Be sure you bring his clothes!" Abe called after her. "I ain't no department store. I'm a poor man, Annie—a poor man!"

II

Red Annie led her son into the pawnshop, and the child looked at everything with great eyes full of wonder. He was a handsome little boy with wavy black hair, round, rosy cheeks, and large eyes like blackberries.

"What's that, mother?" he asked, and "What's that?" and "What's that?"

"That's a mandolin that goes strum, strum," replied Red Annie; "an' that's an accordion with a lot of tunes in it that you pull out like taffy. That's a bellows, and that's a typewriter, and that's a hot water bag."

"What's a hot water bag for, mother?"

"You mustn't ask mother so many questions, Philip. This is Mr. Zollman, and you must call him Uncle Abe."

"Uncle Abe, what's a hot water bag for?"

"For burning little boys what ask too many questions."

Philip looked back into the narrow eyes, unafraid.

"Aw, you're fooling!" he smiled. "You try to look bad, Uncle Abe, but you're only fooling!"

"Ain't he a smart kid?" whispered Red Annie.

Suddenly she burst into tears and lifted the boy off the floor, kissing him again and again. Then she ran from the pawnshop and never looked back. The last that Abe and Philip saw of her was the fire of her hair, like a retreating torch.

Philip looked about him.

"Oh, this is a wonderful place!" he thought to himself.

There were coils of wire on the floor like silver snakes ready to spring. There were brooms, and a lawn mower. There were Turkish rugs woven of wine reds, sky blues, sea greens. On the walls hung various musical instruments—cornets, mandolins, ukeleles, brightly varnished violins that had once caressed the chins of dreamy musicians. In the long show case glittered rings of gold and platinum set with the sharp, inquiring splendor of diamonds, the sullen fire of rubies, the deep, sea-changing green of emeralds, the transparent clarity of Montana sapphires. There were necklaces of amber, coral, and imitation pearl. There were hip boots, powder puffs, bird cages, and heads of Napoleon.

"Oh, this is a wonderful place!" Philip kept thinking to himself.

Abe contemplated the child steadily for some time, uncertain of his next move. He was unused to children, and it occurred to him that the boy might unsettle the ordered routine of his business and his life. He frowned, anticipating minor annoyances, and concluded, at length, that the boy ought to be put to bed.

"Come, *mein boyschick*," he said, not unkindly. "Come, I will show you where you sleep."

When the child held back from such an unwelcome suggestion, Abe almost dragged him up the stairs to the living quarters on the balcony. Philip's room was small and filled with the overflow of Abe's variegated stock, so that there was barely space for the small bed wedged into one corner.

"Undress yourself," commanded Abe, and started to leave.

"I can't undress myself." Philip lowered his face, which was flushed with shame. "You got to undress me."

Abe hesitated in the doorway. He made a movement to step back into the room, and then checked himself angrily.

"Undress yourself!" he shouted. "A big boy like you! It's a shame! Maybe you think I'm going to be a nurse to you! *Sieben jahre alt*—it's a shame!"

"Mother always undressed me," said Philip, remembering her suddenly, and trying hard not to cry. "She said I won't be able to undress myself till I'm ten."

"I tell you, undress yourself and go to sleep!" was Abe's impatient retort. "I got a whip downstairs what I use for boys as don't mind!"

Abe switched off the light in the boy's room and closed the door after him.

There were three separate rooms on the balcony. The one which had been given to Philip was the smallest, and on the extreme left. Abe's own room had a bed, and was also used for his secret business transactions. It adjoined Philip's. On the extreme right was another cubby-hole, the exact counterpart of the one in which the child was now struggling unsuccessfully with his clothes. It was this room that Abe now entered, after he had carefully selected a key from the ring he kept in his wallet.

In one corner of this small room there stood an old-fashioned trunk, with a curved top that showed it to be of foreign manufacture. As Abe bent over the trunk, the scowl of exasperation that Philip had brought to his face gave way to an expression of unclean rapture—the look of a libertine who is about to embrace a soulless ecstasy.

Inside the trunk were stacks of gold pieces of various denominations—fives, tens, twenties. Each stack was a gold pillar that made the inside of the trunk look like a recently excavated Roman city, where only the ancient columns are left standing, the walls having crumbled away with the years.

Slowly and with extreme care, lest he should make a noise, Abe lifted the gold pieces to the floor, his hands caressing their smooth, rounded shapeliness in the same way that the hands of a sculptor might linger over the voluptuous limbs of a marble goddess. The touch of gold, soft, heavy, glittering, caused the pawnbroker to shiver with pleasure. Like a great obscene god, he bent over his gold city, destroying it with one movement of his arm, laving his

fingers, his hands, in the brilliant flood of the coins.

He passed his tongue over his lips, and his breath came jerkily through his nostrils. He held the coins high above his head and let them trickle through his fingers, a deluge of golden rain, a cloud-burst of gold, thick, heavy, soft and sensuous to the touch. The floor was a bed of yellow fire, in which he lay lost in a trance of bliss. The money clung to his body, and each goddess kissed his cheeks, richly, intensely satisfying his importunate senses.

Behind him the door opened softly. An innocent face peered through the aperture and gazed with awe upon the strange scene.

"What you doing, Uncle Abe? Playing a game?"

For a moment the pawnbroker lay stiff and tense, not daring to move, while beads of perspiration broke out on his face. He was suddenly cold and empty of delight. He lifted himself to his knees, and, without looking around, whispered sharply:

"Who is it?"

"It's Philip. I knotted my shoe laces, Uncle Abe. I can't undress myself till I'm ten years old. Mother said so."

"Go away! Go away!" cried Abe. "Go to your room, *du schlechtes kind!* I'll come and undress you—only go away!"

The child slipped out of the room, and the pawnbroker, with his head on one side, like an evil bird's, listened as the small feet pattered along the balcony.

When all was still again, Abe gathered up the gold and replaced it in the trunk, not troubling to reconstruct his pillars. He felt cheated of his nightly joy, his assignation with gold—beautiful gold! Faces watched him from the walls, from the ceiling, from the cracks in the floor. Hands were outstretched to rob him of his precious goddess, his soft, clinging, brazen goddess! He would die if they took her away from him, this courtesan with the golden breasts, the brilliant, seductive caresses! He locked the trunk securely, to make her a prisoner, and emerged on the balcony, sighing deeply, like a man who has been rudely awakened to drab reality after an orgy of the senses.

When he reëntered Philip's room, the child was still struggling with his shoe laces. He looked up out of his large black eyes and smiled timidly at the pawnbroker; but Abe lifted the small feet rudely and set about freeing them of shoes without a word. When he had the boy undressed, he muttered:

"Never, never come into my room again, do you hear me? This is your place, and here you must stay! Next time you want to see me you should knock on my door, or I will give you to the big policeman on the corner!"

"What was you playing, Uncle Abe? Can I play with gold dollars some time?"

"Never! Never! Such things is not for little boys."

But Philip was not the sort of child to be intimidated by angry words. Now, finally divested of his clothes, so that he looked like a naughty Cupid, he was less sleepy than ever. He galloped back and forth across the bed, making believe that he was a race horse. In one furious burst of energy he leaped from the bed and caught himself on the surprised pawnbroker's shoulders.

"This is what they call the great flying leap through the air!" he shouted breathlessly. "Uncle Abe, when are you going to take me to the circus?"

"Get down! Get down!" laughed Abe, attempting to free himself of arms and legs. "Get back to bed, you little devil!"

"Uncle Abe, your face is all full of hairs like!"

The pawnbroker struggled with the child, and at last freed himself from the small hands and feet. He could not have been aware of it in that moment, but he had forgotten the trunk full of gold. He was betrayed by a sudden and inexplicable interest in Philip. The boy's curiously trusting nature mystified and charmed him.

He began to wonder about Philip's father, and love, and Red Annie. The complex structure of life, flesh and blood and bone, beguiled his thoughts away from the gold goddess. Putting Philip back into bed, he lingered to pat the child's head, and the silky texture of the hair pleased him.

"Good night, Uncle Abe," said the little boy. "Will you kiss me?"

"You—shut up! Shut up!" growled the pawnbroker.

Back in his own room, he remembered the color of his wife's hair, and its silky softness, so like Philip's. He remembered the day when they had gone to pluck the grapes from the vines, under the Roumanian sky. They had filled huge baskets with the luscious fruit that soon would be crushed into ruby and diamondine wines.

Under a tree they had rested from their labors, and stray leaves had fluttered down on Rebecca's hair and into her lap. There had been a golden stillness in the atmosphere, and for a moment Abe had felt, strangely and romantically, that he and Rebecca were figures in a painting, forever youthful, immortally lovers under a tree.

The past, and the present! That foolish child putting dreams into his head! He was getting old and foolish—that was it.

He moved along the balcony to the room where he kept his trunk filled with gold pieces. He tried the door, turning the knob back and forth. It was locked, but he could not deny that for a moment he had been frightened.

III

At the end of six months, with no word from Red Annie, Abe began to wonder if she had passed out of his life forever. Perhaps the detectives had caught her, as she had feared they might. In that case she might be sent to prison for ten years or more. What would become of Philip?

Abe thought of the boy's future. It had seemed like a good piece of business at first, but now he had far exceeded the expected cost of the child's upkeep, and presently it would be necessary to buy him new clothes and to think about a school. Six months ago Abe would not have spent a moment debating Philip's future; but time had played an insidious prank upon him, and he was softened. He was becoming fond of the boy, and he had to own that Philip was something more to him than an article of merchandise, security for a loan.

Silver Bow had discovered the child, despite Abe's efforts to hide him, and people were heard saying that the old pawnbroker couldn't be such a miser, after all. Abe's regular business began to pick up noticeably, and the rabbi of the synagogue called and asked if he would attend *shule* on Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur. The pawnbroker curtly declined to do any such thing, and the rabbi went home to his wife and told her that old Zollman was as bad as ever, and that he would be sure to corrupt young Philip's morals.

The rabbi was mistaken in this prediction. As a matter of fact, Abe shielded Philip from his thieving friends and came to feel a secret admiration for the boy's intelligence. He did not worry about leaving Philip alone in the pawnshop during certain periods of the day, for he knew that the boy would be able to take care of himself in all minor emergencies.

On the day when Philip was eight years old, Abe went out to the express office to see about a package that had been delayed, and Philip was left in charge of the pawnshop. It happened that an old Jew, one of the town bums, entered the shop. He was known as Elias Cohen, and he did odd jobs about Silver Bow, earning small sums which he lost no time in spending at the corner saloon. This afternoon, Elias seemed more down at heel than usual. His clothes were shabby and stained, his face haggard, his eyes bloodshot. He looked totally disreputable, yet Philip felt no fear at his approach.

"Please can I have ten cents for a cup of coffee?" Elias asked young Philip.

"Uncle Abe said I mustn't give out money to nobody," answered the boy, but his large eyes were sympathetic. "Are you very hungry, Elias?"

"I ain't had a thing to eat since yesterday," sighed the bum. "I'm starvin'."

Philip did not know exactly what to do. Uncle Abe had said that on no account was he to give out money; but certainly it wasn't right to let a man starve. Even old Elias, whom everybody called a worthless tramp, had to eat, else he would die.

Philip saw that the old fellow was looking intently at the cash register.

"I can't give you ten cents out of the till, Elias," said Philip, who was deeply touched by any aspect of human misery; "but I think I can get you some money, if you'll wait just a minute. Gold money, it is. Uncle Abe keeps it just to play with."

Philip remembered that Abe had changed suits just before going out to the express office, and he had noticed that the pawnbroker had forgotten his wallet. Inside the wallet was the key to the room where Abe kept his gold.

After a few minutes, the child returned with a five-dollar gold piece, which he waved gleefully at Elias.

"Here, take it, Elias. It's a small one, but ain't it pretty?"

Elias hung back from so prodigal a gift.

"Maybe your uncle will be mad on you," he said to the boy.

"Oh, he uses it only for games, anyway," said Philip, and thrust the money into the old tramp's pocket.

"God bless you!" mumbled Elias.

That was his usual speech after receiving a gift; but Philip called after him:

"Maybe God will bless you, too, Elias!"

That night, after Philip had gone to bed, Abe entered his secret room to gloat over his gold. He lifted the shimmering pillars to the floor and counted each coin carefully, humming through his nostrils as he did so. After the first count, however, his humming abruptly ceased, and an anxious look came into his eyes.

It was unusual for him to make a mistake. The second time he worked much more slowly, mumbling the additions to himself, but the result was the same as before. A look of despair came into Abe's face. His eyes shone feverishly, and he began to make a whimpering noise, like an animal that has been injured. After a fourth count his fingers trembled and his mouth sagged open with alarm. There could be no doubt that five dollars was missing.

Reviewing rapidly the events of the day in his mind, Abe remembered that he had missed his wallet in the express office.

"*Oi, veh!*" he groaned. "Philip! Philip!"

He hurried along the balcony to the boy's room, and opened the door. He stood on the threshold, shivering and making strange noises in his throat, like a man stricken with tropic fever.

"Philip, you take five dollars from my trunk? Give me an answer—quick, quick!"

The boy sat up in bed and regarded the old man calmly, even smilingly.

"Yes, Uncle Abe. That poor old man Elias asked me for ten cents. He told me he was starving. You said not to give anybody real money, so I gave him your play money. I just gave him a small one, Uncle Abe."

For a moment Abe felt a fainting spell coming over him. Then, in a fit of mad grief over the loss of his money, he pulled Philip from the bed. For the first time since coming to the pawnshop, the boy's eyes knew fear, and he held back, his lips trembling.

"What you going to do, Uncle Abe?"

"I take you downstairs and get the whip, and I beat you, *du kleiner momser!* Oh, my five dollars! Oh, my gold pieces! The work from my years! The sweat from my brow!" Abe's eyes filled with tears. "Will you look at what takes money from my trunk? A boy what ain't yet old enough to blow his nose!"

He proceeded to drag the child down the stairs, and in the rear of the shop he snatched a small pony whip from the wall.

"Now I will teach you a lesson, *du schlechtes kind!* You think maybe gold it grows on trees, hoh?"

He gripped Philip with one arm, and with the other he whipped the boy's legs, but not with great force. Indeed, Philip felt no pain from the whip; but the pawnbroker's face brought great tears to his eyes and sent them splashing down his cheeks.

"There, there, there, you bad one! Let this be a lesson to you, and this, and this!"

Philip did not cry out or whimper, but bore his humiliation with compressed lips and lowered eyes. After Abe had replaced the whip on the wall, the boy looked up at the old man and attempted a weak smile.

"Aw, you're fooling, Uncle Abe!" he whispered. "You try to look bad, but you're only fooling!" Philip could no longer restrain himself, and burst furiously into tears. "You're fooling!" he sobbed. "I know! I know! You're fooling!"

In that moment Abe Zollman met his master. Looking down upon Red Annie's boy, he was caught up by an early softness, a memory of tenderness, and he quite forgot the loss of his gold in a sudden pain of sharp remorse. He could not account for it, but there was no doubt in his mind that Philip loved him.

It was silly, ludicrous, to play the part of the cruel guardian, when the child refused to be intimidated by beatings and threats. Without fully realizing what he was doing, old Abe bent over Philip and lifted the boy in his arms.

"Yes," he said softly, "I'm fooling, Philip. You know me better as I know myself. Foolish old man what I am! Sometimes, maybe, I'll be a better uncle to you."

He carried the boy up the stairs to bed.

IV

On a certain day in July, one month after Philip had graduated from Silver Bow High School, Abe led the seventeen-year-old youth into the room where the pawnbroker kept his gold. As he lifted the top of the trunk and disclosed the money within, his face was quite calm, even business-like—so far had he traveled in a few years.

"The money is for you, Philip," he said.

" You can go to college and study to be a doctor, like you wanted."

" Thanks, Uncle Abe! You're very good to me," was the youth's simple reply.

Abe reached for the boy's hand and patted it awkwardly.

" I ain't always was good to you, Philip," he murmured. " I was bad and mean many times, but now I want to make up to you just a little bit." He paused for a moment, and then added, with a gesture of embarrassment: " I want to be more a father to you."

" I'll try to make good for your sake, Uncle Abe."

The pawnbroker shook a warning finger at the boy.

" Not my sake, Philip—your own sake. My sake ain't much good. I ain't so proud on my own life, but I'm proud on you."

Philip embraced the old man with grateful affection.

" Dear old dad! I'm going to call you that from now on, instead of uncle. Would you want me to?"

Would it be safe now, after ten years? In all the time that Philip had lived in his pawnshop, Abe had not heard from Red Annie. She might be in prison, she might be dead. He had passed sleepless nights when she had seemed to stand before him, waving her pawn ticket and saying:

" I've come for my boy. See, here's the ticket you gave me! Here's your three hundred dollars!"

Abe dreaded a real repetition of that nightmare as he dreaded nothing else that could possibly happen to him—not even the moment of his last breath.

" What are you thinking?" asked Philip.

" I was thinking, why shouldn't I like a fine boy like you to call me dad? It will make me a young man again."

" I don't think my mother would mind," said Philip. " You always told me, dad, that she never did a mean thing in her life. She must have been such a beautiful, such a good woman!"

" She was beautiful," nodded Abe.

" And good," said Philip.

" Good," whispered Abe. " Good!"

" She wouldn't come back," he told himself over and over again. " God wouldn't be so mean to me now, after I'm a changed man. She's in prison for life, or maybe she's dead. Philip is my own son, and nobody can take him away from me. Oh, God, God, I will pray to you again, like when I was a young man, and I will ask you not to send her back!"

Yet this was certainly Red Annie who stood in the doorway. She had returned at the worst possible time—just when Philip was about to leave for college. Her appearance was most grossly changed, as if the bright, metallic Annie that Abe remembered had been melted in the evil flames of vice and dissipation. She had been slender and graceful; but now her limbs had grown heavy and ponderous, and her face, once proud and beautiful, was wrinkled and flabby.

He could see by the way her mouth twitched that she had taken to drugs, and, on top of this horror, she was reeling from the effects of liquor. Only her hair was the same—the old shade of violent, natural red. It was untidy, and swept out in wisps from under her ludicrous pancake of a hat.

Annie, the Diana among thieves, had degenerated into a doped, common hag who carried a flask of gin in her hand bag; but her hair refused to fade, refused to give up the glory that had been Diana's.

Abe watched her as a man might watch the gallows being prepared for his exit from life. He studied her as she opened her hand bag and took out a flask and an old, grimy pawn ticket. She replaced the flask with fumbling fingers. Then she moved unsteadily to the counter behind which Abe stood, trembling.

" Y' know me, Abe Zollman? It's Annie," she mumbled indistinctly. " I came to redeem my boy, Philip. Here's three hundred dollars, what I been savin' for the las' three hundred years. Where's my son?"

Abe could not speak. He only looked at her out of his narrow eyes, first in disgust, then with pity. He closed his eyes, as if to blot out her sordid reality, but the violent red of her hair pursued him relentlessly and whipped at his heart.

" Y' hear me? Where's my boy? No monkey business, now? Why don't y' talk to me, eh? I'm Annie. I'd 'a' come back sooner, only the lousy bulls in Frisco put me away for eight years. I got sick an' had to take a little dope, y' know. I'd 'a' come sooner, only—y' listenin' to me?"

" I don't know you," said Abe at last. " You're drunk."

" Drunk, am I? Hell of a lot you know about it! But go ahead an' insult me.

You ain't the first what's insulted me. What I wanna know is, where's my boy? I'll give you five minutes to produce him. Wha's right is right!"

"Go away!" cried Abe in agony. "Go away! I don't know you!"

"Liar!" she called, and swept off her hat with one abrupt movement, so that her red hair came tumbling about her shoulders. "Now you know me, huh? Remember when I brought a little boy to pawn, an' you said you'd keep him till I got back again? You give me a ticket to redeem him with. Here's the ticket in black an' white —a little the worse for wear, but good. Now where's my boy? Wha's right is right! If you don't give me wha's mine, I'll call the police, I will!"

Abe was thinking quickly as Red Annie continued to speak. He was thinking of a way to save himself, Philip, and Philip's mother. It was conceivable that he might have given Philip up, even after ten years, but not to this drunken hag!

He had told Philip that his mother was a beautiful woman and a good woman. How could he confront the youth with Red Annie, soiled and bedraggled — a woman who would strive to bring her son down to her own unspeakable depth? Philip was still in his most impressionable youth, just about to make a start in life; and now his mother could wreck his future with a word, could erase all hope and ambition from his eyes.

"Ah, now I know you!" said Abe, and his voice trembled despite his best efforts to steady himself. "You're Red Annie! And you come for your son, hoh? Ah, now I know you, poor Red Annie!"

"It's taken you quite awhile to—hic—recognish me, Abe!"

"But now I know you, Annie. Your boy, Annie—your son—he's dead. He's been dead for five years."

For perhaps a minute she looked at him uncomprehendingly, as if fighting off the meaning of the words that had slowly, mercilessly penetrated to her sodden brain. She stepped back as if she would collapse; and then, shaking her head sharply, and summoning her wits to battle, she moved closer to the counter until Abe could smell the gin on her breath.

"You're a liar, Abe Zollman!" she said grimly, but the pawnbroker's words had left her pale and sober. "You're a liar!" He looked back at her with tightly set lips and unreadable eyes. "You're a liar," she said for the third time, but now weakly, almost inaudibly.

"You call me a liar, Annie—me, Abe Zollman, what has always been on the square with you?"

"In some things you was square. Jus' in some things, like business. Not life, not blood!"

"He's dead, Annie." Abe began to fear that Philip, who was in his room on the balcony, would discover the woman's presence. What could he answer to Philip's questions? How explain? "Go, Annie. You must go to some good doctor who will take good care of you. Never mind the cost. I'll take care of you—only now you must go!"

A note of entreaty entered his voice.

She began to sob dismally.

"You're lyin'! My boy ain't dead. He couldn't die, he was so young an' strong. You're lyin', lyin'! You're tryin' to steal my boy away from me!"

"Come, Annie, I take you home."

Abe emerged from behind the counter, anxious to see her out of the door.

"Leggo my arm!" she screamed. "I can go home alone, without you, you liar!"

She was enraged that Abe should think her incapable of looking after herself, and for a moment the thought of Philip was lifted from her mind. She twisted her arm free from the pawnbroker's grasp and reeled away down the street, mumbling, reiterating mechanically:

"Liar, liar, liar!"

Abe watched her fearfully. Her grossness, her condition of utter detachment from respectability, caused him to close his eyes, as if he would forever obliterate her from his life.

As he watched her disappear, a thought came to him that made his heart feel freer. Why should he not make an attempt to save her from the gutter, as he himself had been saved by Philip? She was a pitiful creature, but it was not too late for her to get a second grasp on life. When she was complete mistress of herself once more, Abe would bring Philip to her.

Yes, yes, it was a noble plan, a beautiful hope!

Abe reëntered the pawnshop and stood by the door, lost in thought, trying to find a way to save her from degradation, so that he might bring Philip back to her and thus find his own salvation.

"Dad, who was that woman?"

Abe turned about quickly, and saw the boy standing at the top of the stairs, on the balcony.

"That?" faltered Abe, looking at the youth, attempting a smile. "You mean—oh, that woman I was talking to? She's a customer of mine, Philip. She wanted to know if I had—shoes to sell. I should have shoes!" Abe laughed shrilly. "Almost every kind of thing I got but what she wanted!"

Philip turned back to his room.

"The reason I asked, dad, was because she looked sort of familiar to me; but I guess I don't know her, do I?"

"No—no, you don't know her, Philip."

After the boy's door had closed, Abe absently picked up a ball of twine from the counter and started wrapping the string around his fingers. When he attempted to free his hands, the string somehow involved his feet. He stumbled, and became more and more entangled and lost in knots and mazes. He was thinking that his brain and his body were not his own, but were at the whim of some leering, sardonic fate that entangled him, and tripped him, and laughed at his discomfiture.

V

WHATEVER Abe's plans may have held of hope, they had no chance of maturity; for the very next evening, as he was about to shut up shop, Annie returned, looking alert and sharp.

Abe guessed what had caused the change in her, and he was more than ever alarmed. There was a note of pathos in the way she was dressed. Evidently she had made an effort to avoid wearing anything that would give her an appearance of lightness and vulgarity, for she had on a black dress much the worse for wear, and her shoes, though down at the heel, had been vigorously polished.

She had been unable to withstand a touch of color. A red scarf flung carelessly over her shoulders gave her the look of a woman who, having adopted mourning on an impulse, regrets her temporary lapse from gayety, and adds, with brusque impertinence, a touch of the *demimonde* to her make-up. No matter how hard she might try, Red Annie would never be able to free herself from that quirk, that touch of waywardness in her temperament, which labeled her at once as a lost woman. Years of petty thievery, of brooding in prison, of drink and narcotics, had left their indelible marks upon her.

The pawnshop was dimly lit. In the front, the ebbing twilight still showed objects vaguely, and there was a single electric globe burning over the counter. Upstairs, on the balcony, a vivid line of illumination under Philip's door testified that he was within—reading, perhaps.

Annie's eyes were hard and desperate as she advanced toward the counter. She was within an inch of Abe when she whispered:

"You lied to me, Abe! I know you lied to me!"

In that moment the pawnbroker had to admit to himself the futility of further evasion. Some one who knew of Philip's presence in the shop—some enemy—must have told her to come back, and now she would never believe that her son was dead.

There was only one way to save Philip the shock of his mother's downfall. Abe must appeal to her on the basis of pride. He must beg her not to shame herself in Philip's eyes.

"Yes, I did lie to you, Annie. He is upstairs, the boy. Listen to me, Annie! I love that boy. It ain't enough to say that I love him like as if he was my own son. He means more as my life, you understand, Annie—more as my life ten thousand times over! Before he came here, I was nothing. I had nothing to live for, no hope, no happiness; but he changed everything for me. Can't you see it in my face, Annie—in my eyes? Look at me, Annie! Can't you see?"

"I don't care," she mumbled. "I don't care. Where is he?"

"But I don't love him so much I won't give him back to you," Abe went on passionately. "Only you must make yourself over for him. You must try, Annie, to cure yourself. What will he think when he looks on you, his mother, and sees you like you are? Be patient for a few months, Annie. He will go away to college, and I will write him you are here; and when he comes back you will strong be again, and beautiful, like once you was."

He finished, and watched her pleadingly, but her face remained unchanged, except perhaps that the lines of her mouth tightened, and her eyes burned more brightly in the dimness.

"I'm his mother," she said doggedly. "He belongs to me. Call him!"

" But Annie, please — do you want he should see you like you are? I promise—"

Without a change of expression, she removed a small pistol from her purse and held it cold and hard against Abe's heart.

" Call him!" she repeated grimly.

Abe was overcome by surprise, by the woman's persistence, but he gave no sign of fear.

" You don't know what you are doing, Annie," he said slowly. " For myself, I ain't afraid. Better you killed me than that I should throw the boy's future away. One death it is like another, and for him I would give my life!"

Red Annie did not seem to hear what he was saying.

" Call him, or I'll kill you!" she repeated truculently.

Still Abe did not call; but in the moment when the bullet should have split his heart the door on the balcony opened, and Philip stood, tall and brilliant, on the threshold.

Abe's face was drained of color, but he did not make a movement; and Annie knew instinctively that her son was watching them. Swiftly, with a motion so instantaneous that it could not have been noticed, she slipped the pistol back into her purse. Gradually she lifted her eyes to that glowing, handsome youth, that living figure of a splendid dream from out of her past—a dream that must forever remain unrealized.

A trifle bewildered by the darkness, Philip came down the stairs, while Abe and Annie stood rigidly awaiting him. Curious as to the visitor, the boy turned up a light directly above her head, and she was suddenly made plain in all her wretchedness. The cruel glare showed her dissipated face, marked by vice and suffering. It showed the tawdriness, the untidiness of her dress. The whole effect of her decay was like a blow between the eyes, yet Philip only looked bewildered.

" Philip," began Abe, realizing that there was no further use in lying, " this is—your mother."

Philip's eyes widened the least bit in horror. He saw her in one glance, and then turned his head away quickly, as if overcome by shock.

In that instant, as he turned away from her, Red Annie tasted to the deep core of her being the bitterness of love that must forever be denied. Her mouth sagged at the corners, and she swayed back and forth in the weakness of despair. Her son had turned from her—her beautiful son!

And she knew why. How could any one find her worthy, a woman so low and degraded? She had come to claim him, and he had turned away. She saw her sins turned to waves of blood, overwhelming her, shutting out her breath.

It was only for the briefest of moments that Philip turned from her, however. He could not have acted otherwise. The reaction of pain had been natural enough in a fastidious youth, a boy who had been told that his mother was a good and beautiful woman.

Philip was naturally the kindest of mortals, and the most forgiving. He recovered himself quickly, and there was that old look in his eyes that seemed to be saying:

" Aw, you try to be bad, but you're only fooling. I know! I know! You're only fooling!"

He turned and held out his hand, but it was too late. Annie, aware of the change in him, of the flood of tenderness that enveloped him, was quick to act. As swiftly as she had hidden it before, she recovered the pistol. She moved back a few paces and leveled the shining weapon at her son and Abe. A crazy laugh escaped her lips, and her face was flushed and audacious.

" Put 'em up!" she cried. " You, Abe, give me all the money in that cash register! Get a move on, you poor fool! Give me all you got, and don't monkey around with Red Annie!"

Bewildered and incredulous, Abe could not help doing as he had been commanded. His sales that day had been few, and there was barely twenty-five dollars in the till. He placed the money on the counter, and Annie swept it with one movement into her purse. Then she moved warily toward the door, still holding the pistol before her.

" Next time a crook comes into your pawnshop don't be so ready to believe the stories she tells you!" she called gayly to Abe. " Who'd 'a' thought this mother stuff was still good for a haul?" She laughed. " But we live an' learn, eh? Mother, huh? Well, that's somethin' I never was an' never will be!"

She opened the door, and the next minute she had disappeared into the darkness.

Philip made a movement to follow her, but he found himself caught and held by the pawnbroker.

" Let me get after her, dad!" cried the

boy. "She can't be far away! You're not going to let a low-down, lying thief like that get off with your money, are you? And she had the nerve to call herself my mother! Let me get after her!"

But the pawnbroker pulled the boy back.

"The police, they will catch her," he gasped. "She will only kill you, my boy. Let her go!"

"Oh, she's vile!" exclaimed Philip. "Did you see her? How could any one be so lost to decency, so low—"

"Forgive her, Philip! Forgive her!" pleaded Abe, and turned away so that Philip should not see the truth in his eyes.

VI

It was perhaps two hours later, after Philip had returned to his room, that Abe, still in the pawnshop, heard some one knocking softly upon the front door. When he answered the summons he found an old woman standing before him, shivering in the cool air that swept down from the mountains. Abe recognized the visitor as Red Annie's cleaning woman.

"Mr. Zollman, it's about Annie. She wants to see you. She's dyin'."

"No!" answered Abe sharply. "That can't be!"

He tried to make the old woman retract her statement, but he did not succeed.

"She wants to see you," mumbled the cleaning woman. "You're to come along with me."

Abe hastily put on his hat and coat, looking nervously at Philip's door, as if he feared that the boy might have heard. There was no sound from the room; and Abe, pulling his hat low over his eyes, followed the messenger out of the pawnshop and through the dark streets to the house on Platinum Street where Annie lived.

The old woman showed him into a room where the only illumination was a candle sputtering weakly on a wooden box. In the bed, Abe saw Philip's mother lying as if unconscious. The red hair that fell over her shoulders brought back strangely her girlish beauty. As he looked down upon her, it seemed to him that only yesterday she had led a little boy into the pawnshop, a boy who kept asking:

"What's that, mother? What's that?"

Abe had thought her unconscious; but she lifted her heavy lids at his approach, and a faint, mocking smile appeared on her lips, which were slowly turning blue.

"Well, I'm done for," she gasped. "Did it with my little gun, I did!"

"Oh, Annie!" Abe caught a strand of the beautiful hair and pressed it to his lips. "Why didn't you wait a little while, like I told you? You could maybe have cured yourself, and the boy he would have loved you!"

"They'll cure me in hell, I guess," she whispered. For a moment her eyes looked glazed, and her hands fluttered by the side of her bed; but she managed to rally, and the mocking smile returned to her lips. "Well, I ain't so bad, am I, Abe? Still got my wits about me, eh?"

"In another minute he would have forgiven you, Annie. Bad as you looked, he would have forgiven you. You did wrong—wrong!"

"I could see his eyes, Abe. That time he turned away I could see how disappointed he was. Me, an old hag, his mother! He just seemed to cave in and go to pieces. Naw—I did the right thing. I left him an empty frame, so he can put in his own beautiful picture!"

"But, Annie, do you think I deserve to have him all to myself? You made a big mistake. Look, Annie—I will go for a doctor, and maybe there is yet a chance. I will go—"

But she motioned him to sit quietly.

"He's—such—a fine-lookin' boy. Like his father," she whispered dreamily. "No wonder he made a man out of you, Abe! Everything he does is right. When he turned away from me that time, he did the best thing. It saved him, an' it saved you an' me."

"You, Annie?"

"Yaa, me. It gave me a chance to do somethin' good for once. I've been a thief, a drunkard, a—well, you know; an' that ain't all I've been, neither. There's some things in my life I ain't even told you, Abe. When I was lowest, I used to talk to myself—a habit I got into down at St. Quentin. 'Well, Red Annie, some day you'll pay for your fancy tricks,' I used to tell myself; 'an' I only hope you'll be big enough to come through straight at the right time. Some fine day you'll get your chance to do somebody a good turn.' Abe, when my boy turned away from me with that helpless look, I knew it was up to me to make good. It came over me like a flash. 'This is that some fine day, Red Annie,' I thinks to myself; so I made as if

I'd come to rob you, Abe. Say, I ain't so bad, huh? I—ain't—"

"Annie! Annie!"

"Oh, what a pretty ring!" whispered Red Annie. "Do you mind if I wear it, deary?"

Then she lay still.

When Abe returned to the pawnshop, it was already another day, and he found Philip awake and waiting for him. The old pawnbroker looked worn and tired, and there was a pathetic droop to his shoulders. Young Philip, in contrast, was full of life and health. It seemed that he could move mountains of doubt and distress into valleys of contentment.

"I got up early, and I was wondering what had become of you, dad. Been on the trail of that woman?"

"Yes—I been looking for her."

"Did the police get her, dad?"

"No, *mein sehn*. Nobody ain't ever going to get her now."

"Well, dad, I'm glad she got away. I've been thinking a lot about her. There must have been some reason why she wanted to make you believe she was my mother. Maybe she has a son somewhere, and she's ashamed to let him see her. She seemed so unhappy, poor thing!"

Philip went to the door and opened it wide. He was just in time to catch the morning sun, which stood on the crest of the mountains, with golden wings outspread, as if eager to begin its glorious flight across the sapphire dome of the sky.

"I wonder where she is now?" asked the boy.

"God knows," said the old pawnbroker.

BALLADE OF THE LAST LADY

SHOULD you remember, where are you now, I wonder,
Shy Laura of the wounded eyes, and May,
A flare of lightning followed fast by thunder,
Sobbing of autumn as I stole away?
And you, mad Dolly, you who loved to play
At love for keeps, till death? I wonder how
The years have touched you all and whom you sway,
Ladies I thought I loved—yes, loved till now.

And Florence, slip of charm, you moonbeam under
The moon we sailed with till an eastern ray
Colored the chalk cliffs rose! And you, a blunder
Shadowed until untrue your name of Gay—
Some wayward wish my youth would not unsay,
So lost you darkly! Where that moon-mazed brow
And where the goddess of too godlike clay—
Ladies I thought I loved—yes, loved till now?

Yes, loved, I dared to think, who put asunder
My ties with trustful Ruth for Blanche, to stay
No truer, ladies. Sentiment's no funder
Of youth's indebtedness; chill falls betray
Our summers' ardent pledges. Men obey
The lure of least resistance, yet allow
Their fancy to turn Lot's wife, thoughts to stray,
Ladies I thought I loved—yes, loved till now

ENVOI

You are avenged, sweet ladies! I'm the prey
Of one unmoved by coaxing, coolness, vow
The whip hand is no longer mine to-day.
Ladies, I thought I loved—yes, loved till now!

Richard Butler Glaenzer

When the Morning Breaks

IT IS NOT ALWAYS TRUE THAT TO THE VICTORS BELONG THE SPOILS

By William Merriam Rouse

IT could not truthfully be said that Johnny McCall liked to fight for the sake of the battle. He was, however, always willing to fight, and he could be eager, if there were spoils to be gained worth the damage to his velvet hide. Often enough he had clashed with other men over a girl or a big jackpot, but never because of an abstraction. Another man could maintain that black was white with the utmost truculence, for all that Johnny cared; and McCall could laugh off an empty insult with a spirit as calm as a mill pond.

Johnny McCall was a perfect human animal. He resembled the panther more than any other among the four-footed brothers. He was neither large nor small of stature, but steel-hard muscles crept and curled under a skin as soft and fine as that of a woman. Like the panther, he would cat-foot around danger if he could, but when the moment came to take or defend he was as swift and ruthless as lightning. At these times his gray eyes became as greenish cold as the waters of Lake Champlain in November, and there was no mercy in him.

It was this Johnny McCall who had known from the beginning of the winter that Bildad Road was not long enough, nor the granite-bound peaks and valleys of the Adirondacks vast enough, to hold both Turkey Barker and himself — not unless one of them turned his face away from the light of the presence of Jeanne Frechette.

To Johnny, the situation was as plain as the simple arithmetic he had done on a slate in district school. He would subtract Turkey Barker, and then he would add to himself the little Jeanne, who had eyes of cornflower blue and hair as soft and black as a clouded June midnight.

Of course, she would want to be married and have everything regular and respectable; but that made no difference to Johnny. He had found the girl he wanted to keep for life, and he had never found any such girl before. He was broad-minded. Priest, minister, justice of the peace, or the simple over-the-broomstick ceremony of hard cider parties made no difference to Johnny. He believed in none of them.

Johnny McCall, indeed, believed nothing that he did not see, and not all of what he did see; but it was to be expected that a girl would have fanciful notions. The country of the snows had never given the world anything so beautiful as Jeanne, and he was willing to take her on her own terms.

McCall was jealous of Turkey Barker, for the reason that Jeanne was kind to Turkey. It was true that she was also kind to old Poléon Tebo, her countryman, but Poléon was old enough to be her great-grandfather. Johnny made up his mind that he would have to thrash Turkey, for the benefit of both Jeanne and the victim; and this was no light task. Turkey Barker was the bull-throated champion of Bildad Road, and his temper was about as tricky as dynamite.

Up from the straggling village at the Corners Johnny went every few days to the neat little frame cottage where Jeanne had lived alone since the death of her parents; but his instinct told him, as surely as if words had been spoken in his ear, that there was something standing between him and the girl. Always, when he tried to become the lover, she faded away from him like mist. Turkey Barker, of course!

Well, Johnny resolved that the thrashing was going to take place at the first fair opportunity. Then she would make up her mind fast enough!

Turkey Barker was one who talked mightily of himself and other lesser things in the store at the Corners, and he swung his great shoulders along the snow-bound stretches of Bildad Road as if he could push the mountains down. However, he did not let himself come to a collision with McCall. Shrewdly Johnny guessed the state of his mind. Turkey was sure of his own prowess, but even the fiercest of bulldogs will hesitate to close with an embattled cat.

II

On a day in January, when the world was spotless with fresh snow, and the air of the blessed north made a single man feel like ten, Johnny McCall found the fresh tracks of Barker's great feet going up the lane toward the house of Jeanne. Well, this day was just as good for trouble as any other. If he could get Turkey out of doors and maul him there, with Jeanne looking through a window, the results ought to be perfect. He would show her what kind of a man he was!

Johnny unbuttoned his sheepskin jacket and tightened his belt before he knocked. He smiled a grim smile as he waited.

From within came the voice of Jeanne, more sweet than any music, telling him to enter. The door opened slowly under his firm grip, and he padded into the room. One woodsman's glance gave him all the details of the picture.

Jeanne, smiling, was bringing a big cake to feed Turkey Barker, who was seated at a table made gay with a red and white cloth. Old Poléon's chair was also drawn up there, and his beady eyes snapped from the face of Barker to that of the new visitor. Poléon was an old-timer, a man who knew. He had seen red battle in the camps, and the snow red underfoot, and he had been pickled and preserved to these ancient days by whisky *blanc*.

McCall saw the look in the eyes of Turkey Barker change. His enormous, lumpy shoulders hunched themselves over the table, and a fist that lay there closed. His heavy mouth drew down.

"Hello!" exclaimed Johnny McCall, grinning at the room. His eyes sought and held the eyes of Jeanne Frechette. "You having a party?"

The girl threw back her head and laughed, while Poléon lifted a withered hand in silent salutation and Barker grunted. Jeanne had white teeth and dimples—one high up on her cheek, and the other at the corner of her mouth. They made a man half crazy, those dimples.

"I have party ever' day, me!" she cried. "Ever' day some mans come to get warm by my fire, get match for *la pipe,* fix snowshoe, somet'ing!"

She put down the cake, a marvel of rich fruitiness and white icing, on the table, and began to cut slices. First she gave old Poléon a big slice, with a pat on the scarecrow white thatch that covered his head. He grinned up at her with a lonesome tooth, and squared off to the cake.

For Turkey Barker there was a slice of equal size. He began to wolf it, crowding hunks into the cavern under his mustache; but he did not cease to watch Johnny McCall.

"You care if I get warm by your fire, Jeanne?" asked Johnny, with a show of mock humility.

"You know ver' well you have hunger for the cake!" she laughed. "I guess it's lucky I'm not poor girl!"

"You'd be mighty lucky for some feller that ain't got a second shirt to his back!" grunted Barker, through a mouthful of cake. "Don't let nobody marry you for a home!"

McCall had slipped out of his jacket, and he swung around, with his body weaving easily from the hips. That thrust was for him. Barker was prosperous.

Johnny smiled grimly. Not enough brains in that big hulk at the table to know that Johnny McCall would just as soon fight him in front of Jeanne Frechette's door as anywhere—yes, a little rather.

"It would cost her something to keep the beef on you!" said Johnny calmly.

"Say! I cuffed a feller your size for getting sassy to me yesterday!" roared Barker.

"I don' want to make marry!" Jeanne interrupted hastily. She held up a hand for peace. "Goodness my gracious! How that *gâteau* disappear! I mus' be fine cook, me!"

"*Oui, mademoiselle!*" agreed Poléon, and he looked meaningly at the loaf. "He's so good he don't las' no time!"

"You want some more," said Jeanne. "Sure! Eat him all up, you mans!"

She cut a double portion for Johnny and second slices for the others. Johnny, taking his, managed to touch her fingers and

hold them for a second. She colored and drew away. Turkey Barker's mustache lifted to a snarl. McCall looked at him challengingly as he walked to a chair and sat down.

Johnny ate slowly, taking note of the familiar room; for if he got a fight started he wanted to be able to watch Turkey as they went out of doors, without having to pay attention to the surroundings. Barker was tricky.

A stout table in the center of the room, a big stove shining with polish at one side, and a chest of drawers. Above the chest hung a silver-gilt crucifix. A cupboard and a half dozen chairs completed the furnishings. There was room to move fast, and that was vital to McCall. Barker's weight would run up to two hundred and thirty or forty in the winter, when his frame took on its cold weather layer of tissue, and Johnny knew that he must not let himself be cornered on the way out. He rubbed his feet on the floor to make sure that his soles were not slippery.

He looked at Barker and grinned insultingly. Turkey scowled, and the copper hue of his cheeks grew darker. The fist that he was not using for the cake twitched.

"What's funny?" he demanded.

"Stop!" Jeanne rapped the table with her cake knife. "Maybe I send somebody home if you don' be polite!"

"Maybe we don't *all* know how," suggested Johnny, in a sugared voice.

"You!" cried the girl. "You're too polite, Johnny McCall!"

"He makes me think of a pussy cat," growled Barker.

"And you!" Jeanne turned and waved the knife. "You don' know what is *la politesse!*"

"Har!" cackled Poléon. "Dat's right, *petite* Jeanne! Sick 'im, by dam'!"

"And you stop make *blasphème!*" she laughed. "Oh, *mon Dieu,* mans are lots of trouble!"

She rose and started for the pantry with the empty cake plate. This was Johnny McCall's opportunity, if he wanted to goad Turkey into starting a fight. With a wink at Poléon, he leaned forward and looked directly into the big man's eyes.

"I like to watch you eat, Turkey," he whispered. "You make me think of a pig in a parlor."

It was here that Johnny's plan went slightly askew. He had accurately gaged the force of his enemy's temper, but he had not quite timed the explosion.

Turkey Barker rose up, regardless of table, chair, and Poléon Tebo, and struck a clumsy blow that would have staggered a horse. The table knocked old Poléon sprawling and piled itself upon him. Barker's chair clattered away as he followed his futile swing, charging with a guttural sound of wrath. In three seconds the room was a battleground.

Johnny McCall was surprised, but he knew from that first blow that, barring accidents, he would be master of the situation. He drove his fist into Turkey's stomach, and was away before the big man could recover from the jolt. There was a glimpse of Jeanne's pale face in the pantry doorway, and of Poléon kicking himself clear of the table. Johnny was full of pride. He would show them what kind of a man he was!

He knew that if he should be gripped by one of those big arms, as thick as his own leg, he would be lost; but each time he caused them to be a fraction of a second too late. He ran in under blows, and struck cruelly. He jumped and kicked; and when Barker, hitting out wildly, drove his fist through the plaster and lath of the wall, Johnny beat upon the stunned giant's face with a tattoo of knuckles which cut to the bone.

While Turkey Barker stood helpless and swaying, blinded by his own blood, and no longer with the power to lift an arm, Johnny opened the door. With a foot driven like a battering ram, he sent his enemy rolling down the steps and upon the packed snow of the path.

McCall waited for an instant, to make sure that there was no more possibility of fighting in Turkey. Then, closing the door, with a smile upon his unmarked face, he turned back into the kitchen for his moment of triumph.

III

JEANNE FRECHETTE was looking at him. Her fingers, trembling a little, pleated folds in the crisp fabric of her dress. Never since Johnny McCall had known her had she looked so grave. All the little crinkles of happiness were gone from about her eyes, and the eyes themselves were filled with shadows. Her gaze was as sad as dusk coming upon a pine forest, as sad as a wind-stunted tree alone upon a hilltop.

"Oh, Johnny McCall!" she exclaimed in a broken voice. "May *le bon Dieu* forgive! It is bad t'ing you have done!"

"He's good fighter, Johnny McCall!" old Poléon croaked excitedly. "*Sacré!* I never see so quick work before!"

From that half heard praise Johnny McCall took a little glow of comfort, but he was chilling under the look upon the face of Jeanne Frechette. She ought to be proud of him, and she was not.

"I didn't mean to muss up your kitchen like this," he stammered. "Honest, I didn't have a chance to get him outside. He swung at me—Poléon saw him."

"You are good fighter—and bad mans," said Jeanne. "I did not t'ink you are bad mans like that, Johnny McCall! You hurt him so! You make him ashame'! *Bon Dieu,* for why?"

Johnny gasped in the dark, cold cloud that had come between him and the girl. He gestured with one of his bleeding hands as he struggled for words.

"I—he wanted to marry you, Jeanne! He'd 'a' kicked my ribs in, if he could! I—I'm a better man than Turkey Barker!"

"He cannot make marry wit' me," she replied slowly, shaking her head. "I have not t'ink of that at all—no! But now you have make my heart ache for him—yes, for you also, Johnny McCall!"

"Me?" echoed Johnny, with an uneasy laugh. "I'm all right! It's him you want to ache for! I—I like you, Jeanne. I—"

"No!" she cried. "You do not like. You want to take—that is all. Now you go from here, you and Poléon! I bring in that mans and fix him nice. He is just big animal, and I have pity; but you, Johnny McCall, you are devil! Yes, I have pity for you also! Me, I can fix the face for Turkey, but for you only *le bon Dieu* can fix the soul!"

In crushed silence Johnny McCall put on his jacket and slowly turned away from her accusing eyes to leave the house. Poléon was at the door before him, and they went out together. Barker stood leaning against the woodpile, with his mighty legs scarcely able to hold his weight. When they had got out of hearing, old Poléon spat angrily and spoke his mind.

"Nice dam' fool you, Johnny McCall! Dose gal like Jeanne Frechette always like under dog!"

"She's mad now, but she'll get over it, I guess," replied Johnny, in a dull voice. "I'll bust him up again if he don't ease off going there so much!"

"You better make long face like religion!" warned Poléon. "I never see so much dam' fool for so good fighter, long as I live, by gar!"

"Aw, shucks!" snorted Johnny, with a grim gaze fixed straight along Bildad Road. "I've had girls before now. You remember when Minnie Barlow married Snake Tanner after he'd punched the head off her feller? Up to then she wouldn't look at him!"

Poléon Tebo's leathery mouth drew back in a grin of commiseration. He shrugged and spread out his hands.

"Minnie Barlow is wild cat. Green eyes—nice! But Jeanne Frechette is angel—too good for mans like you an' me, Johnny! You better go catch 'um hellcat!"

Johnny McCall grunted, his mind already wandering from the advice that Poléon was trying to give him. It would be fitting for him to "catch 'um hellcat," but unfortunately he wanted Jeanne Frechette; and what Johnny McCall wanted he kept on trying to get, until either the thing was his own or the desire ceased. Never in his young life had he failed when he chose to carry on to the end.

It would be to the end with Jeanne Frechette. He wanted her as a man wants food to eat and air to breathe. There was something in him that needed her, and it would not be denied. She was soft-hearted, but he still believed that after she had had time to realize what a feat he had performed there in her kitchen she would greet him with a smile. Any other girl he knew would have been proud of him!

IV

It was unfortunate that Poléon Tebo could not resist the temptation to talk. Too old to have more than a vicarious satisfaction in the lurid events that rejoiced him, he made directly for the store at the Corners, and there, to a tense, silent audience, he wove the epic of a fight which he knew would stand forth in the history of Bildad Road. He finished and threw his head back in triumph, to find himself looking into the battered face of Turkey Barker.

The victim had entered silently, and had stood unnoticed while he listened to the story of his own defeat. Then he stepped forward, washed and bandaged by the hands of Jeanne, and black with hatred for

the old man whose beady eyes met his unflinchingly.

"You old crowbait!" he snarled through clenched teeth. "If you was even ten years younger, I'd tramp you into the floor! But I'll get even with you! None of you ain't heard Johnny McCall bragging any; and if they's anybody here that wants anything out of me, he can have it right now!"

No man spoke, and after a little interval, through which the store clock ticked noisily, Turkey Barker went out. He had defied his world, but from that day forth, nevertheless, his prestige was damaged. His prowess still commanded enough respect to keep others from mentioning his defeat to him, but it was Johnny McCall to whom men deferred as the champion of Bildad Road.

Turkey became morose and greatly reduced of speech. To Johnny he spoke civilly, but toward Poléon Tebo he maintained a contemptuous and malignant silence. With the rest of the world he was as quick to strike as he had been to boast, and men began to avoid him.

Meanwhile Johnny McCall let a week run its dragging course before he went back to the house on Bildad Road where, in the moment of victory, he had met something so much like defeat that it was beyond his comprehension. He knocked, and the voice of Jeanne stopped singing to bid him enter. He saw the old smile, the dimples, the light in her eyes; and he laughed aloud with the thought that she was going to belong to him.

"Jeanne!" he cried, and his feet took him instantly across the kitchen. "You've got over being mad at me, I guess!"

"I have no more mad," she replied, but her smile began slowly to fade.

"I'm going to marry you, Jeanne!"

He tried to take her in his arms, but she went away from them like a shadow, and stood looking at him over a distance of a dozen feet until he moved away from her chair. Then she returned to it and sat down. Her lips still smiled, but her eyes had become very sad.

"No, Johnny McCall, I shall not make marry wit' you."

He choked, and swallowed, and then, as a thought came into his mind, anger flamed up.

"You going to marry Turkey Barker?" he demanded hoarsely. "Are you?"

"I never make marry wit' Turkey. I have tol' him so long time ago."

"Then you—"

"You have fight for not'ing, Johnny McCall!"

"Would—would you marry me if I'd been the one that got licked?"

Johnny's head was spinning, and he could think of nothing but what Poléon had said about the under dog.

Jeanne pointed to the rocker with the gay crocheted headrest, and smiled as she invited him with a gesture to sit down. Mechanically he sank into the chair as he waited for an answer to his question. That answer meant a great deal to him. Perhaps he could make a bargain with her to let Turkey Barker thrash him.

"It is bad time for you and me, Johnny McCall," she said quietly. "Always I have like you too much, but always my heart have queer feeling. It is feeling like when I see fox in trap. His eyes have fear, and much hurt. '*Bon Dieu!*' I t'ink. 'Mans have no pity! He is *sauvage!*' And you, Johnny McCall, you are *sauvage.* You are not bad mans, but you do not know. It is like that, Johnny, and for you and me there is no marriage."

Of what she was trying to say to him Johnny McCall understood only a certain aspect, and that distortedly. He thought she was telling him that if he did no violence at all, she would marry him. How could man or beast live without fighting, without killing? The not unpleasant madness of a child was upon her, and she must be treated like a child.

He laughed from the depths of his arching chest as he rose and walked over to the chair in which she sat. He stooped and lifted the chair and the slender girl in his corded arms, and held them up so that her face was level with his own.

"I'm going to take you, anyway!" he told her, with a fire warming him like white whisky. "You're my girl!"

Now a thing strange to the experience of Johnny McCall took place. Jeanne did not struggle, or cry out, or grow red. Instead, her eyes darkened. They met his own and they seemed to burn him. She was as white as paper, and her lips became like wax. As she looked at him, her gaze found something the existence of which he did not know. It was something that filled her eyes with the most unutterable sadness Johnny McCall had ever seen—the sadness

of regret for all things lost, the mourning of death. Those suddenly dark eyes drew away from what they saw, and Jeanne went away into remote spaces beyond the stars.

"Put me back on floor, Johnny McCall!" the waxen lips whispered.

He put the chair down gently and bowed his head. He had to look away from her terrifying eyes. He edged back to his rocker, and stood fingering the headrest. A little dazed, he found himself shaking with reaction.

"I guess I'll go," he muttered thickly.

Then he looked up, and life returned to him. Jeanne's eyes were liquid blue again, almost with a hint of laughter in them. She sprang to her feet and went toward the pantry.

"I feed you!" she cried gayly. "Mans always have hunger! Times when you have hunger, Johnny McCall, you come to my house and I feed you nice t'ings!"

So in five minutes Johnny was eating with a dry mouth, and grunting answers to the nonsense of Jeanne, and wondering what had happened to him.

What was going to happen? That was more important. Good sense told him to go and get himself another girl. There were plenty of girls who would meet Johnny McCall more than halfway.

Even as he listened to this wise advice, however, he knew that he was not going to take it. He wanted Jeanne Frechette, and he was not going to be beaten by nothing —for that was what had fought him. Nothing had licked him as completely as he had licked Turkey Barker. A ninety-pound wisp of a girl, with fool nothings in her head, had floored him with a look; and just watch her now—as full of play as a three-colored kitten!

V

From that day forward, in spite of his bravado, Johnny McCall was baffled for the first time in his life. He had met a force he could not break down with his hands, and he was helpless. It came to him that his impotence was the same as the helplessness of Turkey Barker that day in the kitchen, when he was so weak that he could no longer lift an arm to parry or a fist to strike.

Johnny's mind was keen and his temper hot. As week after week passed, the parallel with Barker made him more and more furious. With Jeanne he was always the savage to be fed, the friend to be played with, but never the lover. It was the same as the steady cold, the white monotony of the snow; the same as the unvarying sullenness of Turkey Barker and the red glare of hatred in his eyes whenever they looked upon the skinny form and the weathered, sardonic face of old Poléon Tebo.

Johnny began to hate Barker as the cause of his failure with Jeanne. If Turkey had not come butting in, Johnny would not have fought him, and who could say how Jeanne would have felt in that case? Maybe this foolishness about his being *sauvage* would never have occurred to her. McCall realized that another beating of Turkey would not help matters, but he grew to hate him as Barker hated Tebo.

Johnny knew that it was due only to Jeanne's good management that he never met Turkey at her house, and that Barker never met Poléon. That was just as well. It would not take much to start trouble, and this McCall did not deny to himself, although he understood the folly of it.

Turkey Barker's disposition had become barbed, and his unpopularity grew until it amounted to general dislike. The sly thrusts that Poléon Tebo occasionally took at him could not be resented directly with the fists, and Turkey's brain was not clever enough to reply in kind. Hence a careless word from any man near his own age meant a blow from him—a blow which he would have preferred to land on Tebo. The Bildad neighborhood agreed that Turkey Barker was fighting too much; it was hardly safe to say "Hello!" to him. Folks said that something ought to be done to tame him down, but nothing was done.

It was after an entirely unprovoked mauling that Turkey had given to a man half his size that Johnny McCall went out to the house of Jeanne with something entirely new on his mind. Bildad Road and the Corners, always reluctant to have anything to do with an officer of the law, were beginning to look to him as the logical person to stop the violent career of Turkey Barker. Johnny felt that he had to see Jeanne Frechette about it.

It was a cold, clear night, starlit and beautiful, just at the end of a March blizzard. Every crevice in Jeanne's kitchen stove gleamed red, and the griddles wore patches of dull rose. A pitcher of cider and a big china bowl of doughnuts stood on the gay tablecloth; and by the fire Jeanne

rocked and sewed with small, quick hands. It was a warm nest built in a frozen world.

"*Bon!*" exclaimed Jeanne, when Johnny McCall came hesitatingly in, not having been invited for that evening. "Poléon was promise' to come to my house to-night, but he not show up. Sit down, Johnny McCall, and smoke *la pipe!*"

With a sigh McCall made himself comfortable, except for the dull ache because all this happiness was not his own. Shortly he told her of the problem of Turkey Barker's ferocious behavior, and of the suggestion of the Corners that he should remedy it.

"You know Bildad Road is rough," he concluded; "but even on the road a man don't like to get up from the breakfast table and have to fight Turkey Barker the minute he steps outdoors. It's got pretty near as bad as that. He knocked out four of Petey Godette's teeth, the other day, because Petey wouldn't get out of the path into the snow for him. The boys kind of think I ought to drive Turkey out of the neighborhood."

Jeanne let her busy hands fall into her lap, and looked at Johnny through lashes suddenly glistening with tears. Her lips trembled. He groaned at sight of the girl's suffering.

"Old Poléon have done this!" she exclaimed chokingly. "Oh, I am so sorry for Turkey! T'ink, Johnny—he is made ashame' by you, and Poléon tell all the worl'! Is not that bad? I have try make him cheer up, but no, he is hurt too bad. He fight because he have shame; and you want to make him more sorry!"

Johnny wriggled uneasily upon his chair. When he was here with Jeanne in this place of peace, and with the light of her face shining upon him, he was not so sure of himself.

"What about Petey Godette's teeth?" he demanded doggedly.

"Ah, *les misérables!*" Jeanne covered her face with her hands, and for the first time Johnny McCall saw her shaken to the foundations of her being. "Sometimes I t'ink *le bon Dieu* is go asleep!"

In the first few seconds of silence that followed her words, Johnny realized that he had experienced a tremendous shock. He did not believe in any of that stuff, but it was awful to see little Jeanne discouraged. He shuffled his feet nervously. Then, while he sat staring at the silken softness of her black hair, and wondering what he ought to say, there came a sound at the door.

There are sounds that one places instantly, and other sounds that are strange but as harmless as a bark from a man's own dog. Also there are sounds that send fingers of chill creeping up the back, that tense the eyelids and set the muscles for an unknown danger. It was one of these latter sounds that McCall had heard, nameless, but filled with the import of evil.

Jeanne's head lifted, and she stared at him, questioning. Johnny shrugged and shook his head. Then he got up and moved softly across the room. It seemed to him that the door trembled slightly as he put his hand to the knob. He felt a pressure as he started to open it, and he leaped back, crouching to attack whatever might be coming in out of the dark.

There was no danger to him or to Jeanne Frechette in the big form that sprawled over the threshold and lay face downward upon the floor, with hands which tried vainly to brace themselves against the boards and raise up the helpless body. McCall did not need to see the face to know that it was Turkey Barker who had tumbled in out of the night, battered and torn, and without a leg under him.

Jeanne gave a great cry as Barker's head turned and she saw his face, purple with bruises and dark with frozen blood. She tugged at him until Johnny pulled him in and closed the door.

Turkey was wavering upon the brink of unconsciousness, but his flickering eyes knew them, and his lips tried to form words.

"He's got it!" exclaimed Johnny grimly. "Good and plenty, this time!"

"They're after me!" came in a whisper from the puffed lips.

"Who is after him?" asked Jeanne, working to open the neck of the wounded man's shirt. "Ah, *mon Dieu!* We must hide him!"

Johnny McCall felt his glance drawn to a window. Above the frosted lower part of a pane he saw a face pressed close.

"Look!" he cried hoarsely, and Jeanne had time to see before the face vanished. "It's too late to hide Turkey. That looked to me like Pink Johndroe at the window. He's a bad lot. Whatever has happened, this business is no joke!"

"Take him away from stove, quick!"

commanded Jeanne busily. "He have frostbite!"

Johnny McCall lifted Turkey by the shoulders and dragged him to a corner farthest from the heat. Jeanne put a cushion under his head and ran for a bottle of homemade wine, while Johnny stood wondering by whom, and for what reason, Turkey Barker had been dealt with in this fashion. No one man of the Bildad Road neighborhood had done it. Turkey had drawn full measure. McCall had never seen a man worse handled in a fight.

With little noises of pity in her throat, Jeanne turned some wine, a spoonful at a time, into Barker's mouth. The stillness of the room gave place to a low sound which came from the night outside. Again Johnny McCall felt a shiver of dread. He stepped to the door and looked out into the starlight.

A black mass was moving up over the short distance between the road and the house—a formless mass with loose fragments wallowing in the white snow beside it. It was a monster, and as it came it made the noise that had penetrated into Jeanne Frechette's kitchen and filled Johnny McCall's ears with dread. A mob was coming for Turkey Barker.

Johnny leaped back into the room and closed the door. It was useless to fasten it, for they would come through anyhow. He looked at the bowed figure of Jeanne. She raised her head, and from her eyes he knew that she read in his face something of what threatened.

"*Bon Dieu!*" she whispered. "What is it? What we do, Johnny?"

"There's a crowd coming," he said. "I dunno yet what it's all about, but if things get rough you stick close to me."

She stood up, hesitating. He crossed the room and took a place beside her, putting out his hand, as he would have offered it to a child. He was sorry for her, and it was the first time that he had felt that emotion for Jeanne Frechette. It had begun a little while before, when she lost heart because of Turkey's plight. With all her strange power, she was confronted now by something stronger than herself. She could handle Johnny and Turkey Barker, but this was altogether different. Here was a force like a river flowing up against her house.

The door crashed open, and Pink Johndroe scuttled into the room like a disheveled rat, scurrying into a corner at sight of McCall's face. Behind him towered the giant form of Page Buck, the blacksmith at the Corners. Buck carried a hammer from the forge in one hand, and his glance went instantly to the big heap against the far wall that was Turkey Barker.

Men spilled into the room after the blacksmith until his end of it was full. There were more crowding at the doorway, but those in front waited for Buck, and he was slow in his movements. The glass and sash of a window gave way, and others scrambled in. They grew a little quiet, all of them, as they faced Jeanne Frechette and Johnny McCall; but as a mass they pressed forward, and ever forward.

Page Buck took a long stride.

"We're looking for him!" he panted in a cracked voice, and waved the hammer at Barker. "Him—Turkey! He's killed old Poléon!"

"No!" wailed Jeanne.

The bottle of wine dropped from her grasp and smashed upon the floor. McCall stifled an exclamation. He had never thought that it was in Barker to murder an old man. He glanced down at the bruised face. The lips moved, but no sound came up to him.

"You sure, Page?" he asked, looking Buck steadily in the eye.

"I be! Pink Johndroe saw him standing over the old man in the road. He run jest as I got there, and I carried Poléon in to the stove myself. Then we went looking for Turkey. Cornered him in a barn, but he got away from us. They was too many trying to get at him all to once!"

"I will keep him here!" cried Jeanne Frechette in a low, clear voice. "You send sheriff!"

Page Buck shrugged, and laughed a bitter laugh. He glanced over his shoulder at the massed faces behind him. A murmur swelled. The shrill voice of Johndroe rose above it:

"Le's get him out into the road! I seen old Poléon! I seen the ax! Turkey hit him over the head!"

There was a shuffling of feet. Johnny McCall saw Jeanne close her eyes, saw the hammer twitch in the hand of the blacksmith. He looked down upon the form of his enemy, and found himself gazing full into the battered eyes of Turkey Barker.

Terror and a pleading for mercy were there between the swollen lids. Johnny

had more than once seen the same look in the eyes of a hurt dog. It begged him to save, but without hope. The stiff lips worked desperately:

"I—didn't—do it!"

Johnny McCall heard, and Jeanne heard. She turned with a moan. Turkey's big hand flapped open against the floor, as his eyes implored them. He was helpless. Johnny wondered what it was that made him feel so strangely.

To his astonishment, he discovered that he was fiercely sorry for Turkey Barker. From the first he had not taken any pleasure in the thought that Turkey was going to be beaten to death out there in the snow, even though he hated him; and certainly he would have had no part in the killing. Yes, he had hated Barker, but he would not have helped the mob. He would have remained indifferent while they did their work in the light from Jeanne's windows.

That would have been the feeling of the old Johnny McCall; but now he found a new emotion coming up within him with the force of a rising sea. At first it was for Jeanne, and then for Turkey Barker. A tide of feeling tenderer than anything he had ever known engulfed him.

Here lay a man beaten near to death, and these other men, who could stand upon their two legs, were snarling and yelping for his blood. Why? Not to do old Poléon any good. Johnny McCall felt the suffering of the hunted man as if it were his own, and stood amazed at his ability to feel with his enemy. A new fluid ran in his veins. He seemed bathed, and light of weight.

Only a few seconds had ticked away, and Page Buck had not yet had time to cross the room, though he was coming on grimly. Johnny glanced around and saw that Jeanne was slipping away along the wall. It was better that she should. She could not handle this. It was a fight for strong arms.

He reached out, jerked the table to him, snapped it up to one edge, and ripped a leg free. Then he kicked the table back so that in a measure it protected Barker.

"I guess you got to fight, if you want to murder Turkey!" he cried.

"You and him ain't friends!" snarled Buck. "Get out of the way, you dam' fool, or they'll kill you, too!"

For reply Johnny McCall brought the table leg down with a crack over the skull of the blacksmith. Buck went weaving back into the arms of the jam behind him.

Then they came on with that mob roar like which there is nothing else in the world. Johnny's arm was like lightning, and the hardwood table leg brought down a man at each sweeping blow; but there were too many of them. They came in a mass that rolled on because of the weight behind. It crushed Johnny McCall down against the table. Fists beat in his face. He saw streaks of fire that burst in pain. A boot crashed into his side.

Licked—did they want to kill him? Yes—blood mad! The end, but still fighting—

Suddenly the driving rain of blows ceased to beat upon him. Gasping, he tried to pull himself up. He wiped the blood from his eyes. Jeanne there in front of him? They would kill her!

Her hair was unbound, floating down like a cascade of night over shoulders torn free of her dress. Her eyes blazed from a white face, and wherever those blazing eyes glanced the look of the beast was shamed from a man. The mob bore back, stumbling. With both hands she held aloft the silver-gilt crucifix that had been upon the wall.

"Is only two brave mans here?" she cried, in a voice that rang through the room like the peal of a bell. "Only this One I show you now and that mans who have fight for his enemy?"

Silence settled upon the room as silence settles upon a forest burned out. Through that stillness came a rush and a scuffle at the door, and a surge of incoherent cries. Then a wild, thin figure with bandaged head broke through the crowd, which was no longer a mob, and Poléon Tebo took a place beside Jeanne.

"What for you kill Turkey Barker?" he yelled, with madly swinging arms. His eyes gleamed fury. He stepped forward, and with a hard old fist caught Pink Johndroe full upon the nose. "I fall on my own ax! I guess a mans can fall on his own ax in free country, by gar. *Sacré maudit!* I slip down on ax, and Turkey try to help me up! Dat's las' t'ing I know! *Blasphème!* I hope Johnny McCall kick you mans in de breakfas' some more!"

What had been the mob melted out of the room like a shamed dog. Johnny McCall was able to stand up, with his feet braced far apart, and smiled a twisted smile

at Jeanne. Her eyes had changed again. They were as deeply blue as summer skies when she helped him to a chair.

" I take it all back!" muttered Johnny, leaning upon her much more than was necessary.

" You tak' what back?" she asked. " Your head is all bus' up inside, I guess!"

" You could handle 'em," said Johnny, " and I thought it was too big a job for you! Jeanne—I guess—I know why you won't marry me!"

" Sure, I make marry wit' you, my Johnny McCall!" Jeanne laughed through a little shower of tears. " Don't you hear me say you brave mans now?"

Darling, Darling

WILL JANET ROLFF CALL UP THE MAN WHOSE EYES WERE LIKE BITTER BLACK BEADS?

By Elizabeth Irons Folsom

JANET ROLFF stared directly and openly at what the man at the next desk had written—" Darling, darling," in black, strong letters, with a stub pen and a steady hand. There were other words, but her eyes held to the first two—openly, directly. " Darling, darling "—incredible! That man!

As Janet looked, he drew down a blotter and covered the words. She flushed. The meaning of his act was plain—it was a rebuke to her curiosity.

She got up quickly and walked away, turning her back on the row of desks lined up under the windows. She went through the hotel lounge, threading her way among the tables and chairs, where drowsy people were pretending to read—yawning, mostly, for the day was dark, threatening a heavy snowstorm, the wind was whipping branches against the windows, and the wood fire was sputtering smokily.

Janet saw the remains of her flush in the elevator mirrors as she went up. No wonder she had flushed, for she had been caught doing an ill bred thing, and Janet was well brought up. The Rolffs had grandfathers.

" Darling, darling!" she said aloud scornfully, as she dragged out her heaviest sweater.

That man! " Darling " was a delicious word. It had a tenderness—a close tenderness. It was a word that bit into the heart of both the one who used it and the one who received it; and that man!

For a month, there in the big hotel in the mountains, she had seen him constantly. His looks had repelled her. He was dour, hard, sinister. His eyes were bitter black beads. His mouth was a slit pressed tight. His forehead showed deep, frowning lines.

As far as she knew, he had spoken no pleasant word since he came to the hotel. Advances from friendly guests had been thrown back with a silence that chilled; and yet that man was writing to " darling, darling "!

She laced up her heavy boots, fastened her thick sweater close, and put her second-best fur coat over it. It was cold outside. It must be very cold indeed, for even the ski enthusiasts were indoors. None of the winter sports were attracting the hotel guests. It had snowed for several days—lightly, uncertainly, but the flakes that now began to strike her window panes were hard, and clicked upon the glass. To be inside all day with victrolas clacking, bridge games, billiards, gossip, and politics—that was the worst of such a hotel when the sports were tied up.

A door next to hers slammed. It must have been the sour man in whom she had taken such sudden interest, for his room was next hers. Quiet, at least, she had thought him.

He was not in sight when she went down. The door man looked at her.

"Better not go too far, miss. A big snow's coming."

"Has any one gone to the clubhouse?" she asked.

"Only two or three, miss. The road is cleared that way, but it's getting colder by the minute, miss."

"I won't go far, Hanson," she said, and smiled, for even the door man's solicitude was grateful to one without family ties.

As he had said, the road toward the clubhouse, two miles away, was cleared, and Janet started briskly. Almost at once she saw ahead of her a long blue coat that she knew. It had a gray fur lining. She had seen it hanging over sundry chair backs while its owner wrote or read. Well, it didn't matter. He was walking fast. She would pay no attention to him when they met at the clubhouse. She would come back with whoever was there.

And it was lovely! She caught her breath with the urge of it. There were no tops to the mountains, for clouds had folded about them. There was no sun, and no distance. The pine trees were stuck full of the soft snow of yesterday, like hundreds and hundreds of Christmas trees ready to be lighted—garnished, mounted, tufted. Oh, lovely are the mountains in the heart of winter!

She walked fast, but the blue coat ahead was going even faster, for it went out of sight around the first turn. When the last houses of the village were behind her, Janet stopped to look back. There was snow everywhere, and the river in the valley below was solidly frozen. How the world would sparkle if the sun came out! But there was no promise of sun. A slate-gray air was turning darker. The deep valley, with its narrow, rocky, twisting road, was thick with mist.

It was wonderful to be like this—a million miles from any one, apparently. Janet smiled eagerly. It was good to be alone; but John Wilton would be up in a day or two—John Wilton, the man whom she was to marry some day.

A sudden scream of wind met her as she turned a corner—a shriek that came from behind a gray-black wall that was moving nearer. How could a wall of snow be gray-black? But so it seemed. Perhaps she had better not try to make the clubhouse, still a mile ahead.

As she hesitated, the snow wall was upon her—seething, surging, driving into her eyes, stinging her face, slamming her skirts about her; and with it came a more intense cold, sudden and strong. Surely it had not been like this when she started!

She hesitated again. It was a long way back; it was a long way forward. She was far from shelter either way.

Then she remembered the old covered bridge just beyond the next turn. It would be a temporary refuge. She ran for it, and the wind flung her forward. She was halfway through the dark tunnel of the bridge before the wind behind her allowed her to stop. The snow was following in, but at the center the planks were clear.

II

JANET stopped with a gasp, and shook herself. Then she saw that her shelter was shared with the man in the blue coat. There was little to be seen of his face between his high collar and low-pulled cap, but that little was ominous, frowning.

He touched his cap curtly. She spoke first.

"A fearful storm!" she said.

"Yes."

"They are building no more covered bridges up here, because they say that the climate has changed. What would have happened to us without this shelter?"

The "us" was rather familiar.

"You should not have come out," he said.

"Oh, it will soon be over, and they know that I am out. They'll send for me if it keeps up."

"Send—in this storm?"

It did seem almost impossible, with the solid wall of beating snow, and the wind that cut like knives. She shivered.

"Better keep moving," he said in a tone of authority.

She shot an irritated glance at him. Why couldn't he be friendly in this emergency? But she walked back and forth. She tried to move springily.

There were a dozen feet of clear planks. He walked them back and forth, back and forth, and so did she. She did not intend to speak again to a man so palpably preferring to be silent. What a brute he was! Why not say something? Why not try to make the time pass pleasantly until the storm was over?

They passed and repassed each other in

the narrow width of the bridge. This was the man who had written the words, " Darling, darling." Surely he did not know what a brute he was! Janet would not speak again. Of course she would not speak again!

Back and forth they walked in silence. The day was darkening, and the storm was growing. The cold pushed harder. There was positively no feeling in Janet's feet, and little in her hands and arms. Her teeth chattered.

Between the uprights of the bridge, the force of the wind seemed at least partly broken. She flattened herself close and stood there; but she could not stand very long on her numbed feet. Presently she gathered her skirts about her, and sat down between the uprights.

" Don't sit down. You will freeze!"

His voice was sharp. Janet did not answer. It was none of his business.

He stopped before her.

" You must not sit down!"

" I can't walk any more." She was conscious that her voice sounded strangely. " I'm too tired. Is the storm any better?"

" No."

Then he walked on; but he stopped on his second turn.

" I must insist upon you getting up and moving. This cold is desperate."

" All right," she said.

But she did not get up. She leaned her head back against the post and closed her eyes. He bent down and touched her.

" Get up, please!"

" I am not as cold as I was. It is better this way. I'll rest."

Without any further word, he lifted her to her feet. She swayed as she stood, though she tried to hold herself firm.

He was taking off his great fur coat and spreading it broadly on the planks. Then he turned to her, unbuttoned her coat, and took it off. She let him. He was making ready, she thought vaguely, for some foolish fuss about the cold, and it really wasn't so bad. She swayed again.

" Lie down there," he said, and pointed to his spread coat.

" No."

" Lie down. You must!"

" I'm not so cold. No."

" Will you lie down there, please, before we both freeze?"

His eyes impelled her. She lay down on his coat, and he took her own and wrapped it tightly about her feet and ankles. She resisted.

" You—you will freeze—if you give me your coat," she made an effort to say.

" I'll not freeze," he answered. Then he stretched himself beside her. " Please put your head on my arm. Then I can button this coat about us both. It is our only chance."

Somehow she did not think the proceeding unusual. She put her head on his arm, as he had commanded, and she knew that he was buttoning the coat about them both. She lay against his breast—in his arms.

She fought against sleepiness. Her own coat was warming her feet. His arm under her neck was warm. He had a sweater under his coat, too, she thought—two sweaters. How strange! It seemed as if both had prepared for an emergency like this.

A tiny bit of heat crept over her from his breast. The little heat spread. It was odd to feel it creeping over her—relaxing all that cold tightness — spreading — the hideous man who was always rude. She struggled faintly.

Then he spoke.

" I don't know any way to keep us both alive but this. The heat of our bodies will keep us from freezing. Are you warmer?"

" Yes, but—"

" This is no time for a 'but' of any kind. It is life or death."

" I—I'd rather die. I—"

" Well, I wouldn't," he replied, " and I can't let you."

Janet knew afterward that she must have slept deeply. She fought against it, as the warmth grew; but she slipped away into a half consciousness where she floated helplessly, and sleep would not keep away. Her last thought was that perhaps he was not so bad after all. Perhaps the " darling " to whom he had written knew some good of him. Then she slept.

It was still dark when he was speaking to her—close, close. She heard shouts, too.

" They are coming to find you," he was saying. " Now, just a minute until I unbutton this coat."

She felt his breath on her cheek, his arm across her, as he released the buttons. He lifted her up and steadied her.

" Can you stand? Are you all right?"

" I—I—don't speak to me," she said.

" Very well! Call to them. Answer them."

She called.

"Now they will take care of you. The storm must be over. I will go on up to the clubhouse. They won't notice my tracks. They will be too much excited about you."

She did not answer.

III

WHY should she care, anyhow, she argued, in the warm bed where she had been tucked, with hot drinks? Why should she care? She would not allow herself to care. He was just a part of the fur coat. He and it had saved her life, but he need not presume upon it.

She moved restlessly. The dreadful man whose eyes were bitter and black! He had no gentleness, no graciousness. He was ugly. But what was beauty in a man? Antoine, the head waiter, had been painted by half a dozen artists—chiefly women—so beautiful were his liquid eyes, his straight nose, his superlative chin. Antoine, the head waiter—

The door next to hers slammed, and she started. He had come back. Well, what of it? Why think of him? Why wonder that he could write those two words so foreign to what he seemed to be?

It was absurd to think of him; but of course, when one had lain all night in a man's arms, one might be excused for having a faint interest in him. She laughed—a short laugh that broke. And there was John Wilton. Should she tell him? She shrugged and laughed again.

Presently she slipped into her dinner gown and went downstairs. She joined a group of friends and entered into talk of the storm—its suddenness, what a miracle that she had found shelter, how brave she was. She felt quite mistress of the situation, with all the poise she needed.

Then, suddenly, she saw him at the writing desk. The blood rushed and flamed into her face, beat in her temples, surged and tore in her wrists. He sat there, forbidding, repelling—but his breast was warm, and she had felt his heart beat! His arms were warm, too, and they had held her tight! His neck where her head had rested—there were throbbings there—and he was writing as usual at the desk.

She gasped. They caught her and made a fuss over her. They gathered around her, put her in a chair, and exclaimed. If he raised his eyes to glance in her direction, however, she did not see him.

But next morning, when she came down, Hanson gave her a letter. The writing was strange.

DARLING, DARLING:

This to you whom I do not know—the one woman I have ever wanted to know. Darling, darling—it is you. You will never see this, for I shall tear it up as I have torn up other letters that I have written to you these last weeks. I am afraid of you; but if ever—if ever—I am always waiting.

She raised her eyes, and they met his. How his glowed! They were not bitter black beads. His face was eager, alight. Heavens, how could she have thought him forbidding? How could she?

Her gaze upon him, however, was straight and unrecognizing. She had never seen him before, it said. She turned her back and went in to breakfast—a chatty breakfast, gay, but savorless.

John Wilton came that day. He had been held up by the storm, and was eager to talk about it. He wanted to hear details of its violence. The sun was out, and the winter sports were in full swing.

At her first opportunity, she told Wilton.

"What?" he cried. "You don't mean that you—"

"Yes, John, just as I have told you," Janet said quietly.

"Why, he's a cad, a cur! I'll break his neck!"

"I would have frozen, John."

"But this is dreadful! Who is the scoundrel?"

She told him. He blustered the more.

"You say it's Basil Wood—the criminal lawyer known the world over! And everybody hates him!"

"Yes, I suppose everybody does," said Janet Rolff.

"I don't see how I can forget it, or how I can bear it," John Wilton said finally.

"Well, John, it happened, anyhow," she answered.

Wilton did not bear it well; and back in town, when the sports were over, they agreed that he could not bear it at all.

Janet opens her telephone directory to see a name there—"Basil Wood." She finds his number. It would be so easy—just a second, and then his voice.

Twice she has lifted the receiver; twice she has put it back—the last time slowly. If there is a third time—then she will surely call him.

The Ningpo Lily

A STORY OF THE TONG WAR BETWEEN THE KONG YINGS AND THE SUEY SENS

By Paul Deresco Augsburg

SOME proclamations bloom overnight in Chinatown. They make their appearance in the mystic hours before the dawn, when good yellow men are sleeping and even the josses nod. Usually they are plastered on certain brick walls where Grant Avenue intersects with the sloping east-and-west streets. Superior occidentals, jerking down the hillside in bobtailed cable cars, often glance at these bulletins and yawn; but some of them do not merit such indifference. Besides, good taste demands that only those who are threatened should yawn at hints of death.

The proclamations, or notices, might be printed on red paper, or orange paper, or white. They might herald an auction sale, a feast, or a tong war. They might even request bids for the job of destroying Sergeant Arthur Denslow with a teak-handled hatchet, yet that amiable servant of law and order would stare at them with the same sophisticated incomprehension. For the sergeant, albeit he could not distinguish one pagan character from another, always paused before the bulletin boards and made a brave show of reading interestedly therefrom. Only a corporal's guard of Chinamen were aware that Gee Yip, the stool pigeon, translated all proclamations for Denslow.

This afternoon the sergeant spied a fresh notice staring from the wall. He knew it was no old one, because it did not bear his signature down in the lower right-hand corner.

"Well, now, wonder what the yellow boys are up to this time?" he mumbled to himself. "It's on white paper—that means it's sad. Probably it's an invitation to a sermon at the Y. M. C. A. Still, that looks something like the Kong Ying mark up at the top."

Sergeant Denslow could afford to look his puzzlement to-day, for the Pacific had sent a fog ashore to cover San Francisco like a shroud. Why gaze with seeming wisdom at those outlandish oriental hen tracks when no one could see and be properly impressed? Visibility was limited to three scant yards at the farthest.

The sergeant frankly scratched his graying head.

"Ah, well, no doubt it's the sermon," he sighed at last.

He was about to walk away when a paper fluttered down to the pavement at his feet. Out of the fog it came, a silent courier from the great unknown, to settle like a weary gull on the wet cement of the sidewalk.

Denslow stooped to pick up the paper. At the same moment a figure emerging from the mist, started to pass him by. Then it halted, and there was an exclamation of surprise.

"Hello, sergeant!"

"Hi, there, Gee! Just the fellow I'm looking for!"

"What's up, sergeant?"

"This new bulletin, Gee—what's the damn thing say?"

Gee Yip perused the white proclamation, starting at the beginning—which is to say the bottom—and reading his way rapidly to the top. He turned on the detective with a grin.

"Maybe a tong war," said Gee.

"Huh! What does it say?"

"It's to the Suey Sens from the Kong Ying tong," spoke Gee. "It says they got to give back Gai Mong or pay ten thousand dollars cash by Saturday midnight."

"Gai Mong? Is that a he or she?"

"Girl," grinned Gee, who was American-born and somewhat contemptuous of his

ancestors and their ways. "A sweet mamma, sergeant! You know the Ningpo Lily?"

"Get out! Is this Gai Mong gal the same as the Ningpo Lily?"

Gee Yip nodded, and the detective demanded to know what could have happened to the lady. Why should her person be thus publicly demanded, with ten thousand dollars named as the only bloodless alternative? What sort of intrigue was behind all this? Sergeant Denslow believed that he could guess the answer, but he wanted to hear his guess confirmed.

"Some of the Suey Sens stole her last Tuesday night, when the Kong Yings were having a council," explained Gee. "I guess they just found out yesterday who got her. She's a sweet sheba, sergeant!"

"Yeh, so they say," murmured Denslow, for the Ningpo Lily, slave girl though she was, had gained some celebrity in Chinatown as a beauty who snared men's fancy. He stepped up to the wall and signed his name to the ultimatum. "Well, Gee, what do you think they'll do—pay, fight, or give her back?"

"No fight," was the prompt reply. "The Kong Yings got too many gunmen. The Suey Sens will either pay or send the Lily back."

In this opinion Gee Yip was absolutely correct. At that very moment a tong council was debating in secret session what to do with the ravishing Ningpo Lily. It was a sullen gathering, for the Kong Yings were hated as much as they were feared, and only the assurance that they could steal the slave girl without detection had induced the covetous Suey Sens to make the venture. It had been their intention to smuggle her out of town to their tong brethren in Sacramento, there to be held until such time as the Kong Ying tongmen should grow less vigilant here at home; but before they could get her away, the identity of her captors had been discovered.

The capture of the Ningpo Lily had been a great triumph for certain of the younger Suey Sens, and they were arguing earnestly for payment of the ten thousand dollars. On the other hand, the wealthy patriarchs of the tong did not feel anxious to provide the money. To be sure, a beautiful slave girl is a valuable possession; but when one is getting so old that his ancestors seem quite near, there is not so much allure in red, red lips and a body soft and warm. It is not strange, therefore, that the debate waxed hot.

Sergeant Denslow, standing on the sidewalk in front of the warning proclamation, glanced down at the paper in his hand. Then he gave it to Gee Yip, the American-born stool pigeon. The yellow man looked at it and gasped.

"Whew! Where did you get this, sergeant?" he inquired.

"Tell me what the darned thing says," returned Denslow.

"From Gai Mong! It says, 'I am held prisoner in a room upstairs. Please save me from my prison.'"

"The hell it does!"

The sergeant glanced up at the building as if he expected to look right through the fog to the window where the note was dropped. Then he turned abruptly on his heel and vanished in the mist.

II

SERGEANT DENSLOW, you must know, was an experienced officer. Many years, now, he had been plying the policeman's trade, and four of them had been served as a member of the Chinatown squad. He knew several things—that the average man of China is an estimable creature, well worthy of occidental appreciation; that those who give trouble are few but damnably elusive; that for every yellow bird in the hand there are at least ten in the bush; that those ten in the bush will probably stay there, for all that a white man's wiles can do to budge them; that many girls are held as slaves, but few are freed. Besides these and other lessons that experience had taught him, he had an exhaustive knowledge of doors, passageways, and alleys in the narrow confines of Chinatown.

He ran up the stairway to a third-floor hall. Here four doors confronted him. Two, he knew, opened upon the menages of honest Chinese tradesmen with whom he was acquainted. Disregarding these, he turned the knob of a third door. It gave to his hand, revealing a plump, wrinkled and very much frightened matron, for whom, one might safely guess, the amorous young Suey Sens would not give ten counterfeit pennies.

Denslow glanced sharply around, grunted, and rushed to the fourth door. As he had suspected, it was locked.

Thump, thump! Twice the detective's fist crashed upon the panel, but there was

no response. He waited for a second, and pounded again. Then he laid his shoulder to it—a matter in which Denslow had achieved some proficiency in his years of official employ. The door sprang on its hinges, and the detective jumped discreetly back, for the room within was heavy with darkness.

"I'm a police officer," he announced from the hallway. "Don't anybody start anything, because I mean business!"

Then Denslow struck a match and strode into the room. Empty!

At the farther end, he saw, was another door. Again he knocked, again waited, again gave it the ram of that practiced shoulder.

This time he heard a sort of strangled cry; and the next match to be lit revealed the Ningpo Lily staring at him from the corner of a small, bare room. Standing beside her, with one hand still held to the slave girl's throat, was a large, heavy Mongol woman, whose face looked hard and stolid. At this moment it also looked startled, for the detective's thundering fist had wakened her from a nap which she had not intended to take.

Denslow struck a third match, to make sure that two was the total of his prisoners. Before it had burned down to an impotent glow, he glanced again at the Ningpo Lily. She was very easy to any masculine eye; but his was not the hungry sort of look that the slave girl was accustomed to see. Rather, there was something kindly and paternal about it—a phenomenon new to the Lily.

"I got your letter by air mail," Denslow grinned, and at that grin the anxious expression vanished from the girl's face. She smiled timidly, her painted lips drawing back to show her small white teeth. The heavy gold earrings tinkled ever so faintly. "I'll have to ask you and your friend here to come along with me," Denslow added briskly.

The Lily's little hand rested trustingly in his, but the silent Mongol woman was not so tractable. She jerked away, and gave other evidence of her unwillingness to go with the sergeant. She was almost monstrous, for a Chinese, so that her objection was not without some weight.

"I see you don't get the idea worth a darn," observed the detective, after a slight struggle. "I hate to do this to a lady, white, yellow or black, but—"

The handcuffs clicked on the Mongol woman's wrists, and Denslow marched his prisoners down the stairs.

As he stepped into Grant Avenue, he was complacently conscious of the sensation he had created. Already word was flying through Chinatown that the Ningpo Lily, the lovely reason why two fighting tongs were hanging on the very verge of war, was safe in the hands of the police. Merchants rushed to the doors of their bazaar shops to see the famous beauty pass along the street. Their wives stared after her with cold-eyed disapproval.

Two Kong Ying highbinders—both yellow birds in the bush—saw and looked their wonderment. One of them cried out some warning in Chinese, and Denslow felt the slave girl crowd against him in sudden terror. He shook his fist at the highbinder.

"Watch your step, there, Lee!" he growled, and the tongman slunk rapidly away. "I got my eye on you!"

Police headquarters is just a block down the hillside from Chinatown. There was no need to call the wagon; Denslow could walk his prisoners there before a patrol would get fairly started on its way. Five minutes later they were all in the lieutenant's office, and police reporters were telephoning city editors to inquire if they cared for pictures of the yellow but none the less comely Ningpo Lily.

A Chinese interpreter was called, and Gai Mong told her story. It was nothing new to the San Francisco police. She was not the first slave girl to be rescued in Chinatown raids and turned over to the missionaries or the Y. W. C. A. Many of them had been held captive—luckless victims of oriental lust—for several years before some break of fortune finally led to their release.

"Ask her how old she is," ordered Sergeant Denslow.

When he heard the answer—eighteen—he turned to the lieutenant with a grimly discouraged face.

"It's a damned shame, ain't it?" he grumbled. "My girl, Louise, will be eighteen next week!"

"Anything we can do, Art?"

"Not a thing, except you might increase the squad for a few days. The Kong Yings may start war on the Suey Sens for letting their girl get caught."

The lieutenant nodded, ordered the Mongol woman locked in a cell, and had the in-

terpreter explain to the Ningpo Lily her emancipated status. She listened gravely to her countryman's singsong recital. Then her black eyes turned impetuously on Denslow, and, dropping to her knees, she bent till her forehead touched his feet.

"Well, I'll be damned!" growled the detective, but his eyes seemed suddenly to spring a leak.

As the interpreter started to leave, Denslow grabbed his arm. He led the Chinese to a desk, placed a large sheet of paper before him, and borrowed the lieutenant's pen and ink.

"Now fix me up a notice in red-hot Chink," he said. "About like this: 'Gai Mong, alias the Ningpo Lily, has been made a ward of the Chinese Mission. She is also under the special protection of Sergeant Arthur Denslow, and anybody who meddles with her will get merry hell beat out of them.' Better underscore that last. Then sign my name big—do you hear?—and I'll just stick this notice up myself!"

III

THE detective's bulletin, unprecedented as it was in Chinatown, made a profound impression upon the yellow men. Many covert glances were cast at Sergeant Denslow as he passed, and from half a dozen prosperous merchants along Grant Avenue he received grave words of thankful commendation. He was regarded by all peace-loving Chinese as nothing short of a public benefactor.

"That notice I glued up on the bulletin board, it's brought Havana right to my feet!" he remarked to the lieutenant one afternoon.

"What 're you talking about, Art?"

"Take a whiff of this," replied Denslow, holding a patrician perfecto under his superior's nose. "Now strike a match to it, and see what *real* smoke tastes like. That's from Moo Tai Yuen, if I remember right; and here's one of those four-bit babies that Wang Lao hands out to his extra particular friends. Yesterday I was presented with exactly twenty-two seegars from Sullivan Alley to California Street; and the best I ever got before I turned author was fourteen, including one three-for-a-dime Manila."

But the sergeant's bulletin did more than merely enhance his stock of popularity and cigars. It stimulated Wah Poy, a cunning councilor of the Suey Sens, to conceive his great idea. This came to the tongman as he sipped his *eng-ga-pai* three nights after the Denslow notice was posted; and twenty-four hours later the first half of his plan had been successfully carried out.

The first half was this—to kidnap Gai Mong from the Chinese Mission and then surreptitiously return her to the custody of the Kong Ying tong. The kidnaping was a fairly easy matter to accomplish, for fear of the law and of Sergeant Denslow had been the slave girl's only real protection; but to spirit Gai Mong away to the rooms of her former captors was something which required considerable finesse.

It had been necessary to circulate certain false rumors, by which to lure the Kong Ying highbinders away from their preserves, but this the artful Wah somehow contrived to manage.

Within a short time the alarm was out. A horrified missionary rushed to Denslow with the news of the girl's disappearance; and then it was time to execute the second half of Wah Poy's plan. Through a friendly member of the Hip Tung brotherhood information was passed to Gee Yip, Denslow's American-born stool pigeon, that Gai Mong had been kidnaped by the Kong Ying tongmen, and was now in a room that overlooked Ross Alley. Gee's informant had himself seen the Ningpo Lily being carried up the stairs.

This was the great idea of Wah Poy, who liked his *eng-ga-pai*. It gave him considerable face among his Suey Sen brethren, for it killed no less than three birds with one stone. Not only was a witness removed who might send Wah and others to prison if that Mongol woman should chance to talk, but a glorious revenge was inflicted upon an enemy who could no longer demand payment of ten thousand dollars indemnity. As the great Confucius may or may not have said, to assail the foe is human, but to stand by while Sergeant Denslow does it is divine.

"I thank ye, my ancestors," murmured Wah Poy this night, "that you have given me an intellect superior to those of mine enemies!"

As a matter of fact, this was a grievous mistake on Wah's part. Instead of rendering smug thanks, he should have been spending his time in praying for an increase in wisdom sufficient to shield him from the wrath to come. Doubtless there is a pat Chinese proverb to cover just such a situa-

tion as this, but your yellow man has so endlessly many proverbs that some of them are likely to get overlooked in the shuffle.

Even as Wah Poy prepared to celebrate his triumph with a drag of the forbidden poppy smoke, Sergeant Denslow was rushing into action. He knew he would have to work fast. The Ningpo Lily was now too dangerous a property to keep in San Francisco, and it seemed manifest that at the first opportunity the Kong Ying tongmen would smuggle her out of town. Probably her removal would be attempted that very night.

Seven detectives hurried up the hill with Sergeant Denslow, and covered Ross Alley like a penitentiary gateway. Three of them accompanied him up the stairs and stood ready, with pistols and flash lights in hand, to follow him through the door. So swiftly had Denslow acted after hearing Gee Yip's breathless report that he was on the move almost before the Kong Yings discovered the mysterious return of their slave girl.

Previously the Ningpo Lily had been in the custody of two tongmen known to the Chinatown squad as Scarface Lee and Hatchetface Lo. They were always together, and, it is safe to suspect, were together to no good purpose. They had the reputation of being dangerous highbinders, but never had Denslow or his companions been able to catch them in anything more criminal than gambling. It was to their room that the crafty Wah Poy, in his great wisdom, had ordered the Ningpo Lily to be delivered.

The two highbinders rejoiced to find the beauty there. They did not feel any great concern as to the way of her coming. Doubtless the Suey Sens, fearful of gun play if the indemnity were not paid, had taken this means to save their purses and avert the threatened trouble. Whatever the reason, the highbinders' problem was to get the Lily safely away before that Denslow dog should—

"Open up, you yellow snakes!" roared an angry voice.

The next instant the door quivered under the raider's blow. For various good reasons this door had been made specially strong, and it did not give to the sergeant's first attack.

At the sound of Denslow's voice the Ningpo Lily had uttered a low exclamation of joy. For a moment she stood there, like the others, motionless and wondering. Then she darted forward and stretched a delicate little hand toward one of the door bolts.

It was the end of the lovely Lily. With one swift movement of his arm, Scarface Lee cast the knife with which he had gained such a sinister name. She fell with no more sound than a little gasp.

As the door shook again under Denslow's attack, the two highbinders gathered her up and crammed her into a duffel bag. Swiftly yet artfully they disposed her in it, for the Lily's thick black hair was let down to stop the wound where the tongman's knife had entered. Then Scarface dropped the bag into an old trunk that stood in a corner of the room, and climbed into the trunk himself. Hatchetface Lo carefully closed the lid, but did not lock it.

The police were attacking the door with axes now; in a few more seconds they would be rushing in over the wreckage. Lo looked nervously around, and his scared eyes came to rest on an almost empty bottle. So it was that Denslow and his men, when they broke in, found the highbinder dead asleep on the bed, with the bottle lying beside him.

"Pickled like a pig!" exclaimed a detective, rapping the soles of Lo's feet with his gun butt.

The Chinaman only moaned and shifted on the bed.

"Look at that! It 'll take a stick of dynamite to wake him!"

"Oh, I'll waken him fast enough," growled Denslow, "once I get through searching this room!"

He looked everywhere, pounded the walls for hollow panels, scrutinized the floor for telltale cracks, and even examined the low-hung ceiling. One of the first places he went to was the trunk—a small, heavy, iron-bound affair, not much larger than a good-sized chest. The trunk was empty, nor did Denslow see anything to indicate that its bottom might be false, and might cover a hole in the floor.

IV

To understand Sergeant Denslow in this affair it is necessary to know something of his heart. It was, as is sometimes said, as big as all out-of-doors. This was one reason why he was such a good policeman—gentle when folks were in innocent distress, hard when men were bullying and brutal.

Three children of his own, with a mother of whom the sergeant was extremely fond, doubtless had a great deal to do with the size and condition of his heart.

Now, it is a matter of solemn truth, as Mrs. Denslow can affirm, that when he returned home at two o'clock the following morning there were tears in the detective's eyes.

"That little Lily gal, the Chinks have gone and caught her," he told his wife. "Just a poor little ninety pounds of helpless gal, and those dirty skunks—"

He did not finish, but walked into the children's bedroom, to stare at Louise sleeping there beside his smaller daughter. Her brown hair trailed over the pillow for the instreaming moonlight to play with. Her lips were slightly parted, as if she were smiling at somebody in her dreams. Half formed was the dimple in her soft white cheek, and before her face four slender fingers rested. So like the Ningpo Lily's, that maiden hand!

"By gum, Mary, this business has got me all cut up," said Denslow, returning to the kitchen and to the cold lunch that she was setting out for him. "If you could 've seen the Lily once, you'd understand. Such a helpless little kid, just Louise's age—and the way she looked at me when I took her away from those Chinks! I guess, Mary, maybe I wouldn't feel so bad about it if she didn't all the time make me think of our Louise.

"I've sort of lost my appetite," he announced a minute later. "Imagine me, a copper for twenty-one years, losing my appetite because of a little Chinkee slave gal!"

"Shush, Art! I'm proud of you that you do!"

"The pity of it, Mary! Here's the poor little Lily, wanting to be happy, just like any other gal—entitled to be happy, like any other gal—and what do those yellow snakes do? Bandy her around like she was so much merchandise, and she no older or stronger than our Louise! And when I try to help her out—oh, well, I'll show those birds!"

"Where did they take her, do you suppose? Some place out of town?"

"Yes—San José, probably, or Sacramento. The lieutenant sent out a wire to watch for 'em; and to-morrow three highbinders that I know of are going to get what the newspapers politely call a grilling." The sergeant's right fist thumped upon the table. "*I'm* going to be the griller!"

But his strenuous interrogation of the Chinese had no effect whatever. Of the Ningpo Lily's whereabouts or present fate the tongmen seemed to know absolutely nothing—and two of them, in fact, were as ignorant as the sergeant. The policeman could not even find out what Chinese were responsible for her disappearance, and it was merely by hearsay that he knew they were members of the powerful Kong Ying tong.

Several weeks passed, and Denslow had all but resigned himself to what seemed the inevitable. His tribute of cigars had fallen to a scant five or six a day. He could not be unconscious of the fact that he had lost a great deal of face among his yellow clients; but this did not trouble him greatly. He was superior to oriental sensitiveness of face.

It was two months after the Ningpo Lily vanished when the detective learned that she had been murdered. The wily Wah Poy was the means of this discovery.

Chagrined at the final failure of his scheme, Wah had set out to find the reason why. It had taken infinite patience and plotting, but the Suey Sen tongman finally succeeded, with the help of his old friend *eng-ga-pai*. From the lips of a drunken foe Wah Poy, concealed behind a screen, heard the entire tale as it was told to his accomplice; and three hours later the news had been relayed to the eager ears of Gee Yip.

This time Sergeant Denslow did not rush precipitately into action. There was no need for haste. Indeed, there was little he could do in his official capacity as a servant of law and order. Should he arrest Lee and Lo, the Scarface and Hatchetface of unsavory repute, what could he do with them? Who was there to testify against them? Where could he get the evidence to convict them? Plainly it was a case for private justice only.

For two days, then, Denslow went his customary way through Chinatown. Here and there he paused to chat, and one afternoon he even engaged Look Fat Jow, the influential Kong Ying tong brother, in casual conversation. It was fortunate that he did.

"Say, Look," the sergeant said, grinning affably down at him, "what did you fellows do with that little Ningpo Lily? I

sort of liked her, you know, and it made me pretty mad to have you go and steal her."

Denslow's manner implied that, however angry he may have been at the time, his antipathy for the Kong Yings had completely died away. It was this apparent change of heart which caused Look to lower his voice and confide:

"We did not steal the Lily back, sergeant; but we have investigated and learned just why she disappeared."

"Yes?" said Denslow softly, marveling at the suave duplicity of which some yellow men are capable. "Why, then, did she disappear?"

"The Suey Sens stole her back. They had intended returning her to us and then telling you that we had her, but our men were greatly too smart for them."

"And what did they do?"

"That is something I would like to know myself," whispered Look, but his expression was full of the most significant meaning. "I have heard it said that the Lily no longer lives."

"So?" Sergeant Denslow considered this for a moment. "Who were the Suey Sens that stole her back, eh, Look?"

"Ah, that much I know without doubt. It was Wah Poy and Kim On Gun."

"H-m!" said Denslow. "That's an interesting thing to know!"

He pondered the tongman's words for the rest of a sunshiny afternoon. Then he sought out Gee Yip, the American-born stool pigeon, and discussed the matter with him.

Could it be possible that Look Fat Jow had, in part, been right? Was it true that the two Suey Sens had actually kidnaped the Ningpo Lily and returned her to their foes? Denslow wanted the certain truth before proceeding with his new-formed plans.

Now, once one guesses the real facts, the verifying of them is not likely to be such a difficult matter. Throughout the evening Gee and the detective pursued their cautious inquiries through the district. The clock of old St. Mary's, on the borderland of Chinatown, was just striking midnight when Denslow telephoned his wife:

"Mary, I probably won't be home till daylight. It's about the Ningpo Lily."

"For mercy's sake, Art, what's up? Your voice sounds so awfully sort of fierce!"

"I'll let you know later, Mary. Is Louise all right?"

"Of course she is!" exclaimed Mrs. Denslow. "What made you ask me that?"

"I don't know—only I been thinking of her all evening."

Sergeant Denslow stepped from the telephone booth into Kearny Street and walked rapidly up the hill to Chinatown. Crossing Grant Avenue, he came directly to Spofford Alley, where Gee Yip was waiting to meet him. A perspicacious fellow, this Gee, well worth the money that came to him monthly from the chief's contingency fund!

He pointed his hand toward a second-story window—a window so dirty that it all but hid the gleam of the lights inside.

"Lo and Lee," said Gee. "They're playing chuckaluck."

"Which is against the law," murmured Denslow.

He tiptoed up the stairs and knocked softly at the door. Some one called to him in Chinese. The sergeant responded with the words that Gee had taught him, and the key promptly turned in its lock. Ten Chinamen were huddled over a gambling table in the center of the room.

"Well, I can't take all of you," observed the detective, shifting his gun to his left hand and reaching for his handcuffs. "That is, I could, but it would be too damned much bother. You, Lo, come here! Step out here, Lee! You two can represent the rest in jail."

Denslow pushed his prisoners ahead of him down the stairs. Before stepping into Spofford Alley, however, he bade them pause while he searched their clothing.

"That's a sharp knife you got there, Scarface! I don't suppose a young gal would have much chance against a knife like that!"

As he spoke, Denslow turned his flash light full on the highbinder's face. Its momentary change of expression seemed to command his interest; but he made no further comment, and presently Scarface Lee was astonished to see him replace the knife where he had found it. Lo's weapon was returned as well.

The sergeant's next move was also without any departmental precedent. Instead of turning to the right and going down the hill toward headquarters, Denslow marched his captives up Washington Street and away. This route led them to a building

which was soon to be wrecked. It had already been empty of tenants for a week.

"Here's our new jail," remarked Denslow, pushing them through the shadowy doorway. "Maybe you'd be interested in knowing that you wouldn't be here now if it wasn't for a couple of your Suey Sen friends. Get me? I said a couple of your Suey Sen friends."

Conducting the highbinders into the basement, Denslow brought them to a bare, brick-walled room that had been originally designed for storage purposes. Entry was gained to it by a single wooden door, which had been reënforced only a few hours earlier by several heavy wooden cleats. Hanging from the ceiling was an oil lantern such as trainmen use.

Without a word the detective unlocked the handcuffs that held Scarface Lee and shoved the yellow man across the room. The next instant he pulled the door shut, fixed the hasp, and snapped upon it a newly purchased lock.

Then he led Hatchetface Lo to another part of the deserted building and bound him to the wall. Alone in the musty darkness Lo was left, with a gag in his mouth to discourage conversation, and with chains on his hands and legs to dissuade him from travel.

Then Sergeant Denslow stepped forth into the night. It was on just such a night as this, he recalled, that the Ningpo Lily was kidnaped. The air seemed so friendly, with the moon shining bright, the stars gleaming down, and the strange stillness of crowded places overhanging the town—the kind of night that makes life feel sweet and well worth having. As he walked down the hillside, Denslow thought to himself that when he died he hoped the call would come to him on a black and stormy night—the kind of night to make death seem sort of friendly.

The detective found Gee Yip waiting for him again; but this time the stool pigeon had gone his instructions one better, for standing with him in earnest conversation was Wah Poy, the man who liked his *engga-pai*. Without a word Denslow clapped the handcuffs on the astonished Wah, and turned about once more.

"I really expected to call for you," he said at last. "Are you armed? Yep, so you are! In fact, I think you got a slight advantage in length of blade."

They were crossing Stockton Street now.

"You remember the notice I put up on the bulletin board a couple of months ago? Well, I gave all you yellow rats fair warning to leave that poor little Lily alone. If you and your partner, Kim On Gun, had left her alone like I warned you to, she'd be alive and happy to-day. I guess there's no argument to that, eh? Now I got just one thing more to tell you—if it hadn't been for a couple of your Kong Ying friends, you wouldn't be walking into this building to-night. I thought you might like to know. One's named Lee and the other's called Lo. They're old friends of yours; and if you step spry, you'll get a chance to meet 'em both!"

Sergeant Denslow unlocked the storeroom door, removed Wah's handcuffs, and then shoved him inside. For a minute he stood at the door, grimly listening to the sounds of deadly battle. Then he hurried down the slope to arrest Kim On Gun, whom he found asleep in a room overlooking Commercial Street.

A detailed account of what subsequently took place in the storeroom would not make pleasant reading. Enough to say that two hours after Scarface Lee had been locked alone with his knife and his conscience, Sergeant Arthur Denslow walked out of a restaurant in Kearny Street and again toiled up the Washington Street hill.

He turned in at the building which was soon to be wrecked. Using his flash light to guide him, he stepped down the stairs and came to the storeroom door. For perhaps three minutes he listened. Once something seemed to move inside, and at regular intervals he heard a faint, low sound of moaning.

Finally he threw open the door.

"Who are you—Lo? I thought so, but your face don't look itself to-night!" Denslow stepped into the room and flashed his light at the three bodies lying on the floor. "All dead?"

Lo, who had been lying with his head resting on one of the slain Suey Sen tongmen, groaned what appeared to be an affirmation. The sergeant eyed him coldly.

"Well, I suppose I've got to arrest you for murder," he said slowly; "but maybe that won't be necessary. I see you still got your knife there, and it 'll take me a few minutes to call the wagon. Do you understand me, Lo? I'm going to be gone for a few minutes to get the wagon. You've still got your knife, eh?"

The highbinder nodded and picked it up. Denslow turned quickly, shut the door, and listened. Some thirty seconds passed; then the sound of moaning ceased. All was quiet in the deserted building on the hillside when the sergeant hurried toward headquarters to report an astounding discovery.

The bodies of four notorious tongmen had just been found in a basement room where, apparently, they had met and battled to the death. That was Sergeant Denslow's report, in which he was upheld later in the day by the findings of a coroner's jury.

Which, somehow, does not seem an adequate explanation of the fact that when the sergeant next walked his district from Sullivan Alley south to California Street, he received a total of thirty cigars.

The Rose-Colored Rug

WHY JANIE GARNS CHANGED HER MIND ON THE IMPORTANT QUESTION OF THE BEST FLOOR COVERING FOR HER FUTURE HOME

By J. U. Giesy

THERE is a Spanish saying which runs—"*Tomavo la por rosa, mas devenia cardo*"—or, in English, "I took her for a rose, but she proved to be a thorn."

Janie Garns knew nothing at all of Spanish, and little enough of roses, save an occasional flower shop bunch; yet the quotation is not inapt as applying to her mental condition on the evening when she came back to her lodging house room and found the note from her roommate, Helen Long. After reading that cruel missive, she went over to her cedar chest, opened it, and knelt beside it, now and then dropping a slow tear on what it contained—things gradually gathered together and laid within it by Janie's own hands.

For a long time the cedar chest had been no more or less than Janie Garns's hope chest. Until the last month there had been no indication that it would not eventually fulfill the hope that had inspired its possessor; but now—a fresh tear trickled from Janie's dark eye and dropped unstayed from Janie's chin.

Until a month ago, not taking into account the chest and its contents, Janie had been possessed of several valuable things. She had youth. She was just past nineteen. She had a darkly piquant beauty of face and a figure not to be overlooked, since it was so well worth looking over. She had a good position, and the expectation of presently getting married — which was where the hope chest came in.

Getting married is not a difficult accomplishment, provided one has both the inclination and—the man; and it happened that Janie had been possessed of both those things.

The first was natural enough in a perfectly normal young woman. The second was Reginald Harding—Reggie, to the set with which he played about. He was a slenderly graceful young man, with the usual complement of eyes and nose and mouth, a not too masculine chin, and hands and feet. These last he used in a skillful manner when dancing, as well as for the purpose of transporting himself about. He was employed in the sales department of a large wholesale concern with offices a scant block from the building in which Janie herself was employed.

Before she met young Harding, Janie had had several matrimonial chances, but none of her suitors had suited her well enough to arouse more than a passing interest. Reggie, however, was a careful dresser with a careless manner that rather lifted Janie out of herself. In the evenings he took her

to movies and dances, declaring himself extremely fond of music—by which he meant the type of music customarily denominated as jazz.

That is, he took her to such places of amusement at first. Later—well, later it was Janie who suggested that they ought to save. It was Janie who inaugurated the fifty-fifty lunches, where each paid his own check, which from then on became the routine of their lives. They still went occasionally to a place of amusement. Being young, of course they did; but they sort of soft-pedaled on expenses, after they became engaged.

Besides everything else that she had, Janie had a head, and she figured that the way to get ahead was to use it. That was about the time when she bought the cedar chest and began to fill it. She and Reggie began to do window shopping. They would pause before some display behind heavy plate glass to indulge in some such conversation as—

"Oh, Reggie, isn't that the swellest rug? The rose-colored one, I mean."

"Sure!" Mr. Harding would assent, eying the article in question.

"Still, rose does fade awfully," Janie would consider. "Maybe we'd better get a green one."

That was where the streak of thriftiness in Janie's make-up came in; and that streak of thriftiness, as we shall see, was to blame for everything.

The trouble began when she invited Helen Long to share her room. Helen worked in the same office as Janie, and she appeared a very rose of young womanhood. Where Janie was dark, Helen was blond. As opposed to Janie's somewhat quietly reserved disposition, Helen prattled and sang and sparkled like a rippling, sun-kissed stream.

Janie didn't really want a roommate; but she wanted to fill the cedar chest as quickly as possible, and by dividing room rent that object could be furthered. She had heard Helen announce that she was going to change her room; so she asked her, and Helen assented. Janie mentioned the fact to Reggie at their fifty-fifty noontide lunch.

"Oh, for weepin' in public!" Reggie exclaimed. "Now you've spilled the beans, I guess. Where are you goin' to park this jane when we want to go out and play around?"

"Why, I suppose she will attend to that herself," Janie said, a little slowly—for, until Reggie voiced his question, it had not occurred to her that she had erected the third angle of a triangle by inviting Helen to share her room.

"And if we drag her around with us, where are we goin' to save anything on the proposition?" Reggie went on.

"We won't drag her," Janie declared, with a conviction which events were to prove unjustified; for while Janie fully expected Helen to look after her own entertainment, she did not expect her to do it in quite the fashion that Miss Long employed.

Helen proved an interested roommate from the first. The very next day after she moved in, she met Janie as they were leaving the office at noon.

"Oh, hello!" she smiled and dimpled. "Goin' to lunch? If you are, I'll go along."

"Why, yes, but I'm going with—some one," Janie said slowly, thinking of Reggie and knowing that her cheeks turned pink.

"Your B. F.?" Miss Long inquired—by which Janie knew she meant "boy friend."

She nodded.

"We always have lunch together," she explained.

"Me and my boy friend—my boy friend and me," Helen giggled, and gave Janie's arm a squeeze. "Well, that's fine! Every girl ought to have one. I won't mind. Take me along, and we can talk him over to-night. How long you had him?"

"Long enough to become engaged. We're going to be married soon," Janie said, a little stiffly, since she was none too well pleased by the turn of events.

She took her roommate with her, however, because she couldn't very well help it. Helen prattled gayly through the course of the meal, at the end of which Reggie, abandoning his thrifty custom, paid the threefold check.

"Fine way to save money!" he jeered that evening, when he and Janie were attending a movie.

"I'm sorry. I just couldn't shake her," Janie returned. "She seemed to want to meet you."

"Oh, I ain't kickin'. It was you suggested the fifty-fifty lunch arrangement in the first place," Reggie pointed out, in a way to show that he was taking their engagement seriously, since he was already adopting a matrimonial style of recrimina-

tion. " Personally, I don't mind spendin' a dollar now and then, and—she seems a nice little thing."

" It isn't that I mind spending money, either, Reggie. It's just that I want to save so that we can have our own home," Janie protested, as the picture faded out with the heroine in the hero's arms.

" Well, yes," Mr. Harding assented dubiously, rising.

A few nights later, when they planned another excursion, it was Reggie who suggested taking Helen along. Miss Long accepted the invitation. She had a way of accepting—everything.

They went to dance; and if there was anything Helen could do it was that. She shook a dainty and wicked little foot, and had a way of yielding a lithesome figure to her partner's arms.

Janie did not enjoy the evening as greatly as she had enjoyed similar evenings in the past; and on the way back to their lodgings a further episode occurred to mar her happiness.

They were passing a window in which was displayed a rose-colored rug—the shade that nagged at Janie's inclination, as against her sense of practicality, in planning her prospective home.

" Look, Reggie! Isn't that a beautiful rug?" she exclaimed.

" Swell," said Mr. Harding, as they paused to inspect it; " but I thought you said rose faded."

" Well, it does," Janie admitted. " I s'pose it would be better to get a blue or green one."

" I like rose better. It matches my complexion," Helen giggled. " That would be swell in a room with a brass bed and white or walnut furniture, and the walls done in cream."

" I'll say it would!"

Reggie gave her a glance which might have indicated even to a casual observer that he was adding her blondness and pink-and-whiteness to the suggested color scheme.

" S'pose it does fade," Miss Long added, shrugging graceful shoulders. " You'd get the fun out of it while it was doin' it, and we only live once. I believe in havin' a good time as you go along!"

" Me, too," averred Mr. Harding, with a positiveness which displeased Janie, and which ought to have warned her.

But to Janie their engagement was such a definite fact—she had accepted it so fully, and had schemed toward its final fruition with such absolute concentration—that she never dreamed of the disaster that was coming. Not even on the night at the movies when the orchestra was playing " Roses of Picardy," and Reggie, in what seemed an absent-minded fashion, picked up Helen's hand instead of her own, did Janie foresee the imminent future.

Instead, she showed Helen her hope chest, displayed its contents, and discussed her plans. Miss Long giggled, as usual.

" Squirrelin' things away already! You're a great one! Say, listen—anybody can get married and furnish a flat nowadays without waitin'. There's always the installment plan."

" Not for me, thank you," Janie objected. " I like to pay for things as I go along."

" Well, you would that way, too," Helen snickered; " but I get what you mean. At that I can see you're goin' to be the *Shylock* of the family. Reggie would show a lot more speed if you'd let him. His tastes are more like mine."

By this time she was calling Mr. Harding " Reggie "—which, even if not wholly to Janie's liking, was natural enough, since wherever he and Janie went Helen made one of the party. If Reggie was less demonstrative in his manner toward Janie than in the past, that, too, seemed natural, considering the fact that Helen was with them.

So that Janie really did not mentally visualize the actual situation until the day when Helen, pleading a headache, stayed home from the office, and Janie, returning at her usual hour, found the note telling her, in carelessly written phrases, that no matter how much like a rose Helen had appeared, she, like other roses, was possessed of thorns, and that Janie had been—stung.

DEAR JANIE:

Me and Reggie have talked it over and decided that we are better suited to each other than you and him. That being the case, he and you getting married would be all wrong; so we're being married this afternoon. I guess you'll think this a pretty low-down trick, but Reggie feels I'm his sort of girl, just as I know he's my sort of man; and you've got to look out for yourself in this world, and grab what you want when you get the chance. After all, we only live once. Tell the boss I'm all through with him. HELEN.

That was the missive Helen left. As has already been recorded, Janie read it and

went over and opened the cedar chest and knelt beside it, staring into it as one stares into a casket. Truly it seemed to her that it held, not the things she had placed within it, but rather the broken shapes of dreams.

II

How long she knelt in such fashion she never afterward knew; but after a time she closed the lid and rose.

"Tell the boss," Helen had written.

Janie's lips set into a straight line. She was glad, now, that she had not told her employer of her own intended marriage, as she had more than once been on the point of doing. This way there would be no need of explanations. She had been tricked and betrayed. She had lost Reggie; but she still had her job.

And because of that more serious element in her nature, so different from Helen's, she continued to keep it in the days that followed. She simply lived on and worked on.

The cedar chest no longer held her interest. Like the episode that had inspired its purchase and filling, it remained a closed thing.

She changed the scene of her noonday meals from the little café where Reggie and she had formerly met for their fifty-fifty lunch. She found another place in quite the opposite direction from her office building; and if for any reason she had to pass the store in which it was located, she kept her eyes away from the window in which she had seen the rose-colored rug.

Janie was human, and there were times when she questioned the poet's assertion that it is better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all—even as there were other times when she surprised herself by realizing that, now that everything was over, she really didn't miss Reggie so very much. From this last fact an older and wiser head than Janie's might have deduced that she had been in love with love, rather more than with Reggie himself.

And then one day somebody spoke her name as she was consuming a solitary lunch:

"Janie Garns!"

She glanced up into the steady brown eyes of Joe Berry, a boy whom she had known when the two of them were children, but whom she had not seen for a good many years.

"It is Janie Garns, isn't it?" he said, as their glances crossed.

"Yes, Joe." Janie smiled. Joe wasn't as handsome as Reggie. There was a sort of squareness about him—all over, but particularly in the lower part of the face. He wasn't unhandsome, either. There was a dependable look about him, and Janie was glad to see him. "Take the other side of the table, Joe," she urged.

"I mean to, now that I've found you like this," he said. "After all, the world isn't such a big place, is it? You can meet 'most anybody if you'll just stand still in one place long enough."

"You haven't been standing still, have you, Joe?" Janie quizzed.

"Well, no—not exactly."

He drew out a chair, and sat down and grinned at her.

"Let's see!" said Janie, knitting her brows. "You went into the newspaper business, wasn't it?"

"Yes and no," replied Joseph. "I'm a reporter. The city editor says I'm quite a reporter, and I think he means it, because he backed up his opinion with a raise, last week."

"That's splendid!" Janie declared. "I'm awfully glad to hear you're getting along so well!"

"Oh, I'm getting by, all right," said Joseph. "You're looking wonderful yourself," he added.

"Am I?" Janie dimpled before the frank admiration he made no seeming effort to keep out of his words or his eyes. "In just what way do you mean?"

"Every way," Joseph told her, unabashed.

A waitress took his order. They chatted about each other until he was served, and their luncheons were finished, and Joseph had paid his own and Janie's check. She allowed him to do so without protest; and after they were outside, she gave him her address.

That night, for the first time in weeks, Janie opened the cedar chest. It was two-thirds filled—and it had been good to meet Joe Berry. He was going to take her to a show—not a movie, but a real dramatic performance, for which he had passes from his newspaper. Last week he had had a raise. Some of the strained reserve of the last weeks went out of Janie's eyes, leaving room for a softer, more speculative light.

As before mentioned, Janie Garns had a

head; and for this reason she changed her technique.

The show to which Joe took her two nights later was the first of a series of dramatic and musical entertainments they attended during the ensuing months. Like Reggie, young Berry was fond of music; but the type he preferred was the sort that Messrs. Wagner, Grieg, Schubert, and Tschaikowsky wrote. Highbrow stuff, Reggie would have called it, and so it was, in a sense; but Janie liked it, and gradually came to feel that she liked it infinitely better than the syncopated concoctions that Reggie had insisted on — especially when she heard it with good-natured, dependable, appreciative Joe Berry at her side.

And she liked the places to which Joe took her afterward—quaint little resorts off the beaten trail of the city's night life, with which he had come in contact in his newspaper work — places where one could sit and talk and watch the other patrons. She came to like such excursions better than the dances of which Reggie had been so fond.

At the same time, Joe and she sometimes danced, or went to a type of show where Reggie's sort of music carried the major theme. Indeed, there was a broadness to Joe's menu of entertainment, as about Joe himself; but it was restful just to sit at a little table and talk to him, or to have him talk to her of his ambitions and aims. For Joe had aims and ambitions, and after a time Janie came to feel that in the end she might become one of them.

The climax came, as such things so often do, in an unexpected fashion, on a night when they were walking back to her room. There was a rose-colored rug in a show window, and, as usual, Janie sighted it, paused, and exclaimed:

"Look, Joe! Isn't that a lovely rug? The rose-colored one, I mean."

"Mighty pretty," Joseph assented, eying the handsome example of the weaver's art.

"Still, rose fades," said Janie. "Blue would wear better—or green."

Joseph eyed her.

"All the same," he declared, "I like rose the best."

Though she didn't admit it, Janie was suddenly happy. What she had been wanting all along was some one to agree with her inclination, rather than with her more practical judgment.

"And," Mr. Berry continued, in amazing fashion, "there's nothing I'd like better than to have you and a rug like that in a home of my own!"

"Joe!" Janie cried in a whisper; for though a whisper isn't very noisy, it can be almost as tense as a scream.

"J-Janie," stammered Joe, as if a little shaken by his sudden outburst, "I—Janie, I mean it. I—I've been—wanting to tell you—for some time!"

"That you wanted a rose-colored rug?"

Janie dimpled. Womanlike, she was more at home in this sort of thing than the man; but Joe stood his ground.

"And you—in my own house. *Everything*—rosy!"

"Why, Joe," Janie teased, her pulses singing, "I didn't know you were a marrying man!"

"I'm not," said young Mr. Berry. "I don't expect to be married more than once—to you. I'm crazy about you, Janie! Janie, don't you care—a little bit?"

Janie did. As a matter of fact, she had been caring more and more as time went on. This being the case, she frankly admitted to Joe that she cared not only a little bit, but quite a lot, and that a flat and the rose-colored rug and herself were none of them unattainable dreams.

As a result, by the time she kissed Joe good night, she was once more an engaged as well as an engaging young woman, and the cedar chest straightway became a hope chest again.

III

JANIE at once began to complete the filling of the chest. This proved a fairly easy task, since, regardless of her opinion as to the partnership quality of marriage, she was all through for the present with the fifty-fifty system. She let Joe pay the freight wherever they went, and confined herself to playing the part of the clinging vine.

And she clung to such good advantage that Joseph, asserting himself in masculine fashion, was perfectly happy; while Janie, realizing how much better suited they were to each other than she and Reggie Harding had been, began to feel that she actually owed Helen a debt of gratitude for having taken Reggie off her hands.

In the end the chest was filled to overflowing, through Janie's being able to use the money she had formerly paid out on the fifty-fifty scheme. One day she went to her employer with the announcement

that she had more than once in the past considered making; and her employer frowned before he smiled.

Janie considered that frown as great a tribute as she did his following words:

"Well, Janie, I certainly hope you'll be happy, and I'm mighty sorry to lose you. All I can say is that whoever he is, he's a lucky man. When's it going to happen?"

"Next week." Janie blushed. "I—I could go on working, but Joe—he's my *fiancé*—would rather I didn't."

"Joe's right," her employer declared. "He has the right idea. I congratulate you both."

Janie thanked him, put on her hat, and went home; and right here is where this story might have ended had she not found Reggie Harding sitting in the boarding house parlor when she arrived.

"Reggie!" she cried.

"I—was—waiting for you, Janie," Mr. Harding said, as he rose. He spoke a little wildly. "I—I've got to see you—to talk to you, Janie. Couldn't we—take a walk?"

Janie considered. She was surprised. Besides, there was something she couldn't fathom in Reggie's face and manner.

"Well, if it's strictly private and confidential, we might walk over to the park and watch the squirrels for a while," she decided at last. "That is, if you aren't—afraid."

"Meanin' I'm a nut, eh?" Reggie remarked, with no indication of resentment. Indeed, he somehow seemed mild, washed out. "Well, maybe you're right. I ain't sayin' you ain't. I'm about done in—just about shot. That's why I had to see you."

"Well, come along, then," Janie prompted, and led the way outside. "How's Helen?" she asked.

"Don't!" said Mr. Harding, in a strangled voice.

Janie knit her brows. The tone of the young man's answer filled her with both speculation and additional surprise; but she kept all that to herself until they had seated themselves on a park bench, with Reggie frowning down at his feet.

"Well?" she said then.

"Eh?" Reggie jerked up his head and turned his face toward Janie. "After all, it's pretty much your fault, you know," he declared.

"What is?" she questioned sharply.

"The whole hash." Reggie drew a long and unsteady breath, and elaborated at length. "It was you that asked her to be your roommate, and introduced her to me. Everything would have been all right if you hadn't done that. As it is, it's a wash-out. I'm fed up. Maybe you're sore. You naturally would be, I guess; but you got your revenge, whether you know it or not. You shoved me up against her, tryin' to save on room rent, just like you was tryin' to teach me to save. You know how the old song goes, don't you, Janie? 'You made me what I am to-day—I hope you're satisfied!'"

"I did?" Janie eyed him. She had an inclination to gasp, for, after what had happened, Reggie's accusation was about the most amazing thing to which she had ever listened in her life; but after a time she contented herself with a deep breath. "Well, I don't know," she went on. "If I really did have a hand in makin' you what you look like right now, I'd say it was a rotten bad job!"

"It is." Mr. Harding nodded. Apparently he missed the point. "It is, Janie—just that—just a rotten bad job. That's why I came to you. We—we've got to patch it up."

"We have?" Janie faltered, a little bewildered.

Though it was easy enough to gather from Reggie's statements that the rosy Helen had proved a thorny proposition to him as well as herself, still she couldn't see just what she could do about it, or why she should do anything at all.

Reggie nodded.

"Why, yes. Helen and I have talked it over and decided that the best thing is to quit. We don't hit it off, so we're goin' to get a divorce. There's places where incompatibility and failure to support are considered cause for that. I'll say we're incompatible, and, as for support, nobody could give that kid all she wants. You ain't like that. You're sort of restful, Janie, and you don't want everything in sight. You like to save; so after Helen and I are divorced, why, you and I'll get married, just like—"

"Married!" This time Janie did gasp. She hardly knew whether to be angry or to laugh, so she gasped, and rose, and stood looking down at Mr. Harding. "You mean you hunted me up to tell me—ask me—to marry you—after all that's—"

"Why, sure!" Mr. Harding also stood up. Apparently he failed to interpret the

strangled quality of Janie's voice. He smiled. One might say he smirked. Almost it seemed that he preened himself before her. "I always was fond of you, Janie—you know that, even if I did make a mistake; so if you'll just wait—"

"Wait?" Janie repeated the word, but in a way that gave Mr. Harding pause. She paused until he stood eying her in a less self-confident fashion before she went on: "Listen, Reggie! I could wait from now until doomsday, and I wouldn't marry you then—not if you were the last man on earth!"

"But, Janie," Mr. Harding protested, "I thought you'd understand me. I thought—"

Janie cut him short.

"I know you did. I know what you thought. You thought I'd be delighted; but you're all wrong about that, even if you're right about my understanding you. I understand that you're a quitter. You quit with me, and you want to quit with Helen; but I made a lucky escape, and I'm glad of it. You and Helen really did me a favor, and I can't marry you after you're divorced, or ever, because, you see, I'm engaged."

"You mean there's—somebody else?" Mr. Harding stammered.

"Yes. Does it surprise you?"

There was a twinkle of amusement, almost of malice, in Janie's blue eyes; but Mr. Harding sighed. All at once his voice, his expression, his entire bearing, became disconsolate.

"No," he said. "No, nothing surprises me, Janie—not now, I guess. It's just—just another illustration of the inconsistency—the injustice of—your sex. You introduce me to her—fling temptation into my path—and then, when I stumble, you won't give me a chance to—to—"

Janie Garns lost her temper.

"I'll give you just about a minute to take yourself away from here," she interrupted, "and then—I'll call a cop!"

For a moment Reggie studied her face, and then, as one who wakes from a dream to a stern reality, he sighed again and walked off.

Janie watched him fade out of her life, and walked home and telephoned Joe Berry.

"Oh, Joe dear!" she said, when he answered. "I just wanted to tell you that I've decided to buy the rose-colored rug!"

THREE SONGS

A BIRD sits in a leafless tree—
  A little thrush—his note is sad;
Perhaps he holds a memory
  Of the past springtime, bright and glad,
When in a scented solitude
He watched beside a precious brood.

A brook sings in a wind-swept glade;
  The flags are dead upon its brim,
And in the bleak and sullen shade
  The whispering trees stand gaunt and grim;
In cruel winter's strangle hold
Its voice is harsh, its tones are cold.

A bird is singing in my breast;
  It sings the same in any clime,
In any season makes its nest;
  It reckons not of change or time.
Its notes are sweet and fresh and true,
Singing of home, and love, and you!

Elizabeth M. Montague

A Wife from New York

THE STORY OF ROB FORNHAM'S MATRIMONIAL ADVENTURES

By M. L. Storrs

AN interesting subject of conversation found its way that evening into the particular Warburton clique known as the Country Club crowd. Rob Fornham was bringing his new wife home on the eight-o'clock train, and the conservatives, true to their New England tradition, shook dubious heads. Not like a Fornham, they said, to go off half cocked like that. Why, it couldn't be more than six weeks since Rob went to New York on law business for the firm.

The younger, I'd-be-wild-if-I-dared contingent, rolled the romance upon appreciative tongues. Rob, tall and light-haired, with his sturdy English air—despite five generations of Americans behind him—and with those blue eyes which for no reason at all had a seagoing look, made a fine figure for the hero of a love drama. However, conservative or modern, they came around at last to one question—how was Carol Beaton taking it?

Up in the big Fornham house, near the Country Club, Honora Fornham, as she waited for her brother John to come home from the station with the bride and groom, was also thinking of Carol Beaton. An erect, boyish figure, Carol had ridden in last week on jaunty little Heartstrings. Her voice had been firm, her head high, as she said:

"I'm happy about Rob—so happy!"

But at the hurt of those gray eyes Honora had longed to draw the tawny head to her shoulder and say:

"There! There! Never mind pretending! I understand."

Honora crossed the room and rearranged a ranunculus which had fallen from the copper bowl on the piano. A mirror near by gave her pause to survey critically her smoothly waved hair, with its few locks of gray; her serene, faintly lined face; her tall, graceful figure in its smart tan dress. This was a nervous business, for she felt like a mother about to welcome a new daughter-in-law. Her own and John's attitude toward Rob was decidedly parental. A ten-year gap in ages made for that.

If only Rob had described her, Honora thought! It was like him to write, "Her name is Juliette. I met her the day after I reached New York," and think this a sufficient picture of the young woman who was about to become a permanent member of the family—yes, even a household member, until some one died or moved away; and it was very difficult to find a house in Warburton.

Wheels—on the driveway! No mistake this time!

In the hall, Honora forestalled Cally, the odd little blond maid, who was about to open the door. No one but herself should welcome Rob's bride!

The veranda light fell upon the snug blue coupé, upon John's solid figure, with its thatch of graying hair, upon Rob, tall and boyishly slender, and upon the bride, as she was helped to the step.

"A larger girl than I had expected. They're so slim nowadays"—such was Honora's first vaguely troubled thought. There followed a jumble of "Juliette!"—"So glad to see you, my dear!"—"Train right on time"—"Show you to your room"—"You must be tired"—as three people nervously tried to bridge a difficult situation.

Honora could not help feeling that somewhere there had been a mistake. It seemed that Rob must have mixed wives as babies are sometimes scrambled in a hospital. This couldn't be Juliette—this woman with the well corseted, matronly figure, with the face not so much lined as—yes, experienced. Her sole claim to youth was a real-

ly fine color, which—in this light, at any rate—gave no hint of the rouge pot. No, she couldn't be Rob's wife. Why, standing there beside her, he looked, for all his twenty-five years, like a mere infant.

They were upstairs at last, and Honora hastened to see that Mrs. Dinsmore took up the roast duck before it was overdone. Mrs. Dinsmore, though she presided over the kitchen, was a "working housekeeper," and had never permitted the familiarity of her given name.

Yes, this was Rob's wife, this woman whose hair gave evidence of artful retouching. Looking at her across the best Fornham napery and silver, Honora came to nauseating realization. Rob called her Juliette. She held his hand under the table. It was all incomprehensible, as yet, and confusing; but there she was.

Rob, still a little embarrassed, was talking rapidly and boyishly. They had been engaged for three weeks, he said; and since he must come home anyhow, they decided just to "up and do it with no fuss." He raced on to their honeymoon, assisted now and then by a question from John, who sat quietly eating, while his shrewd eyes, shadowed by their heavy brows, passed with casual interest over the face of his new sister-in-law.

Golf? No, they had played but once, Rob said. Juliette tired easily. They had drifted about the river a good bit in flat-bottomed boats. Some pretty spots along that river, and the days had been warm for March. While he talked, Juliette sat silent, her fork poised negligently above a morsel of duck, her brown eyes with their red lights rapaciously intent upon her husband's ruddy, boyish face.

"One little glade was particularly sheltered," Rob went on. "We found anemones there. I—"

And then Juliette caught him firmly about the throat with one arm, and laid on his lips a kiss the warmth of which gave cognizance neither of new-found in-laws, nor of Cally, wide-mouthed in the door of the butler's pantry, as she entered with a silver tray of rolls.

In bed, several hours later, Honora discussed the matter with herself—a way she had in the dark of the night.

"You rather expect those things of brides"—so she came to the defense of Juliette. "I don't suppose John and I should have felt so awkward. Poor old dear! How he did fidget there in the library when she sat on Rob's lap, mussed his hair, called him her ducky boy, and kissed and kissed him! We must be hopelessly New England and strait-laced." Then, coming like a plea in rebuttal: "If she were an impulsive girl, I'm sure we'd feel differently: but that woman!" And at last, drowsily consoling: "Anyhow, 'twill be only until the honeymoon period wears away."

Whatever the technical length of honeymoon periods, Juliette's open and active adoration for her young husband showed no early evidence of wearing away. After two weeks of it, Mrs. Gilden's dinner left Honora hotly, though privately, rebellious. On this, Juliette's first public appearance in Warburton, she was a splendid figure, even to her sister-in-law's prejudiced eyes. A dress of deep, brilliant blue paid compliment to her fine coloring, and shaded lights shielded her dark hair, which was coiffed low at the back of a well shaped head.

The affair went amiably through introductions and before-dinner small talk, until, amid the well bred scramble of tracking down each his particular place card, Juliette's rather high voice rose complainingly to Honora's ears:

"Darling! Are you away off over there?" And then, to the company in general: "We've never been separated at table, not in all our married life!"

While humiliation for her brother's wife shivered over Honora, there came, in the ensuing conversational pause, a sibilant whisper from some one behind her:

"What a damned old fool!"

Little Mrs. Gilden began, in her helpless, fluttery way, to rearrange the seating of her guests; but Rob cut her short by escorting his hostess to her place at the head of the table, and passing the whole matter off with—

"Here! Here! Don't take my wife's little joke so seriously!"

Even then Juliette *would* lean across to her husband and say:

"I was just telling Mr. Benjamin about the queer old man with the hack, dear. Remember?—the old man who took us to our hotel."

And in the next lull of the conversation it would be:

"Sweetheart! Mr. Benjamin was at Tarrytown the week before our Sunday there. We were married just after"—this

to the table in general. "Of course we hadn't decided then."

And when, with the final coffee cup drained, they returned to the drawing-room, Juliette clung to Rob, patted him, and wanted to know whether her "big booful darling" had missed her.

"Rob will say something to her. Surely he'll say something!"

Thus Honora communed with herself in the darkness of the night; but if he did say something, it was evidently of little weight. On the following Wednesday, when the four Fornhams ran down to Boston for the opera, Rob was plucked, petted, kissed, and "booful darlinged" on the train. At home, in garden or house, with guests, before the servants, or strictly *en famille*, he was never free from Juliette's harrying hands and caressing voice.

For a month Honora talked the matter over only with Honora. John, deeply averse to gossip in general, and deeply loyal to Rob, avoided all open criticism of his new sister-in-law; but at her first visit to the Fornham offices even his reserve broke forth.

Juliette had borrowed Honora's coupé, without suggesting that the owner should make the party a twosome. Her attitude toward Rob's brother and sister was a negligent one. She had early made it plain that she found living with her husband's relatives both awkward and dull.

At half past five that evening John came home—alone. Honora was writing letters in the library. He gave her a gruff "Hello, Hon!" and, walking to the fire, viciously kicked one of the blazing logs.

Honora laid down her pen with an air of humorous surprise.

"The poker is in the rack, old dear," she remarked.

"Damn the poker!" returned John, and again he endangered his boot in the flames.

"No," corrected Honora. "Not 'damn the poker,' but 'damn something else.' What is it?"

John whirled upon his sister. With his thatch of hair fiercely upstanding and his thick eyebrows bristling, he looked like a mastiff roused from customary gentleness to fighting fury.

"That woman!" he said. "That fool woman!"

"What has Juliette done?" inquired Honora, readily comprehending the identity of "that woman."

"She came to the office and slobbered over him! Oh, I know the word's messy, but she's messy, I tell you! Kissed him—mussed his hair—called him her precious, blessed lamb, her darling big boy! And between whiles she begged him to go on with his work! Great Heaven, when the Lord made her, why didn't he give her sense?"

"Where are they now?"

"Coming in the coupé, if she hasn't honeyed and big boyed him into a ditch. Honora"—John came to stand impressively over his sister—"something must be done!"

"What can be done?"

"Suppose you talk to her."

"John, I couldn't!"

"But this is serious. He can't stand it, I tell you. No real man could. Why, he'll come to loathe her! Yes"—in answer to the shock expressed in Honora's face—"I mean it. He'll loathe her!"

Poor Rob, thought Honora, sitting there aghast! Poor, poor Rob, loathing the pluck and pat and harry of Juliette's hands, the eternal blandishment of her voice, and yet tied to them irrevocably!

"Try it, Hon." John patted her shoulder. "I know it seems like rotten interference; but my God, this is Rob! If she can come to see that it humiliates him, it may make things—well, endurable."

II

It was a warm spring afternoon. The light, streaming across Rob's wife as she relaxed in the cretonne-covered chair, was merciless to her hair and the fine lines in her face. Having sought out her sister-in-law, Honora came to the point nervously and warily. Warburton was "frightfully New England," she said. Doubtless Juliette had had little experience with "Puritan reserve." Honora did not want to interfere. Even approaching the matter was difficult; but because she loved them both, and wished to safeguard their happiness, she was telling Juliette what it would be difficult for Rob to tell her.

"Born to this atmosphere," she went on, stanch even before the flushed anger of her sister-in-law's face and the growing hostility in those red-brown eyes, "born to our ways, he knows that your more—more open affection is causing comment; and it is unbearable to have our loved ones criticized. I knew you didn't

understand. He enjoys your tenderness, of course, and your—your caresses; but this rather public display of them makes for—well, for humiliation."

Then flamed forth the fury that had gathered behind those antagonistic eyes and the set of that full-lipped mouth.

"Humiliation!" Juliette ripped forth. "Do you think I care for your second-rate town and your New England airs? For Rob's sake, you say! You blind, repressed old maid! Rob never lived until he met me. I taught him self-expression, and how to love freely and fully. He was choked by your obsolete conventions, your stupid inhibitions!"

She was on her feet now, her hands clutching as if they would tear at Honora's very flesh.

"Wait!" she threatened. "Wait until I tell him of your prying, poking interference. He'll not be fooled by it, any more than I am. Don't you suppose I know that it's nothing but jealousy? That you hate me because I took him away from you? You wanted to play dog in the manger with him. Now that he's slipped your apron strings, you're trying to make trouble. Humiliate!" She screamed the word in a perfect fury. "Oh, some day I'll humiliate you!"

Honora escaped at last, shaken and nauseated by this glimpse into the turgid shallows of Juliette's mind. A longing to be away from the scene of storm carried her out into the garden; and there she remembered that there were gladiolus bulbs to be planted.

Quieted by the healing peace of a still spring day, Honora dug and poked. She was immune to time until the five-o'clock whistles shrieked through the stillness. So late already! The boys would be home soon. She must dress for dinner.

There were just two bulbs left. She poked a hole in the soft earth, placed the onionlike object, and was about to give it friendly covering of soil, when her ears were smitten by the smooth murmur of an automobile entering the driveway from the boulevard.

Honora straightened, pushing the damp hair from her eyes, as the turn gave view of a low blue car, its top down in deference to the glory of the day. At the wheel sat Carol Beaton, and beside her a sunny-faced young man, his hat off and his blond hair rumpled by the breeze.

On seeing Honora, the girl came to a stop with the privet hedge between them. Her hands rested lightly on the wheel, and the reminder of a laugh was on her young mouth. How natural it seemed, thought Honora, to see her and Rob laughing together! They had always been like that—two people one of whom fired in the other the tinder of merriment.

"My word, Hon! Gardening at this hour?" Rob shouted it blithely, as he used to shout before he went to New York.

Honora approached the hedge.

"Carol, you sweet thing!" she exclaimed. "You've neglected me."

"And this is pure accident," said Rob.

"The purest pure," assented the girl. "I was in the garage, having Blueboy reshod on his right front foot." Essentially a horsewoman, Carol had a way of discussing punctures in the parlance of the stables. "Just then in hove your two brothers with a limping engine. They found it would take half an hour to be mended up, so I offered to drop Rob here while John waited for the car."

"And she drove like a fiend," chortled Rob. "I've spent the last five minutes wishing my life insurance were doubled and redoubled."

"You haven't," contradicted the girl. "You've adored it. When your brother isn't along, you make your own bus step out, I notice!"

Oh, their badinage was good, good! Honora relaxed in it. She even forgot Juliette, until the high laughter died from Rob's face as if he had awakened and stretched in the glory of a June morning only to recall, the next moment, dark thoughts which had accompanied him to bed the night before. She followed her brother's eyes to the driveway, where like an avenging fate about to sweep upon those joyous young heads, she saw his wife.

Rob deftly averted a scene. He sprang from the car. Having met and kissed Juliette, he led her forward and introduced her to Carol. Then he raced along to tell of the damaged car and Miss Beaton's timely aid.

The ominous flash of Juliette's eyes was subdued. Gradually her face lost the swollen appearance which accompanied her rages. However, there was warning in the look she cast upon the girl and in the proprietary rest of her hand within Rob's arm, as if she said:

"He is mine, understand? Old friends are well enough, but he is mine!"

So it was little wonder that Carol, with a sweep of her hand, was off again, Blueboy swinging gracefully about the hawthorn at the head of the drive and then away—taking with him, Honora thought, all the day's laughter and gladness.

III

It was soon after this that Rob first remained late at the office. When he telephoned Juliette, she peremptorily ordered him home; but he must have been firm at his end of the line, for she finally let him off on condition that he would hurry and eat a delayed dinner with her. When John arrived, his sister-in-law demanded if eight hours a day were not enough for a man to be "chained to an office desk."

"Extra work overtakes us now and then," he conciliated.

"Apparently it overtook Rob rather than you," was her pointed response.

"In this case, yes."

Juliette flung a Spanish shawl about her and went into the garden, where she paced until Rob's arrival, an hour after.

A few days later Rob again telephoned that he would not get home at the usual time. Having had only a light lunch, he had already snatched his dinner, and Juliette must eat with the family.

In sulky quiet she sat at the table and tasted her food. Plainly she suspected Honora and John of a conspiracy to keep her husband from her.

The third time Rob failed to come home, Juliette went dinnerless, and Honora gathered that there was a scene in their upstairs sitting room.

"He'll hardly do it again," Honora said to John.

"No," was the response. "He can't have even that relief."

"You mean that he doesn't have to stay?"

"There is always work around a law office," John made equivocal answer.

For all this, less than a week later, John arrived without his brother.

"Didn't Rob get you?" he asked, surprised. "He was trying this phone when I left, but something interfered with the connection. Anyway, he'll be home early."

Juliette had listened to this, her dark eyes danger signals, the alternate pale and flush of her cheeks harbingers of wrath to come. The wrath, however, was not vented upon her husband's relatives.

"Honora"—her high voice had a hysterical note—"may I have your coupé?"

"But don't you think—"

Juliette was not listening. She snatched a coat from the hall closet and was off for the garage. They watched her take the driveway turn like a madwoman. Then John sprang for the telephone.

"What are you going to do?" asked Honora.

"Tell him to send Miss Raymore home."

"But Juliette couldn't think—with Miss Raymore such a thoroughbred, and wearing an engagement diamond—"

"She's jealous!" said John, and gave the office number.

Rob and his wife returned within an hour—he with a weary, badgered air, she subdued yet triumphant; and he did not stay late at the office after that.

As the days progressed, Honora watched Rob grow thinner, more silent, more repressed. Formerly the social member of the family, he now shrank from appearing in public. Why go to the Country Club? The dances there were all alike. Mrs. Maybury's dinners were a bore. He was fed up with those affairs at Chilton Manor. Even the golf links, through lazy spring days, knew him not; and his favorite actress played in Warburton three nights without his apparently taking note of it.

Juliette, however, frequently accepted invitations to luncheons, bridge teas, and the like. When possible, Honora sent her to these alone — that high voice was so penetrating, and the eternal subject of its discourse was Rob, Rob, Rob.

One afternoon Honora had made excuse from a club reception to work in the garden. Deep in the study of a wee parasite that had attacked her roses, she was startled by a voice behind her:

"Mrs. Rob Fornham, I believe!"

Beneath the massed white blossoms of the hawthorn stood a man neither young nor old, neither tall nor short, neither handsome nor ugly. With impudent ease he pushed back his straw hat, rubbed a red forehead, and volunteered pleasantly:

"Hot for May!"

"I'm not Mrs. Fornham." Honora's tones were calculated to lay low his unctuous assurance "She doesn't happen to be at home."

"But she lives here." The man gave a short nod of satisfaction. "Mrs. Rob Fornham—recently married, I believe!"

Honora returned to her rose bushes. Once more his voice came behind her, blithely impertinent:

"Will she be home soon?"

"No. Would you care to leave your name?"

"She doesn't know me. Little matter of business. I'll drop in again."

Watching him stride off down the driveway, Honora was puzzled. Although she couldn't say just what the difference was, the man wasn't the salesman type. Furthermore, she felt that somehow his mission had been fulfilled, and that he had gone away—yes, satisfied.

That night John evinced unexpected interest in the visitor. He asked questions, and gave curt nods as Honora answered them.

"Did you tell Juliette?" he inquired finally.

"A salesman, she said, and dismissed him at once."

"Um-m-m!" grunted John, with another nod.

"You've an idea who he was," accused Honora.

"Well, sort of a hunch, perhaps."

"Tell me!"

"Not worth while."

She badgered him, however, until he came forth with—

"Your description might fit a private detective."

"A private—but why? How?"

"I'm only surmising. She might have made inquiries of some detective agency, and they, without her sanction, might have sent out a man as a sort of feeler. Those agencies follow up business just as other concerns do."

"You mean that she would employ a detective? But not for—not for Rob!"

"I don't know, Honora."

"He's so straight and loyal and dear! She couldn't!"

"Jealousy is a disease, Hon. Rob is good-looking. She couldn't have traveled around with those loose-tongued women and not heard rumors of—Carol, perhaps."

Juliette herself, in the days following, bore out John's suspicion. She was increasingly distrait and restless. She wandered about the garden, sitting a minute here, two minutes there. She met the postman and brought in the mail herself. She borrowed Honora's coupé for vague "shopping tours."

She clung to Rob with a tigerish abandon. Every moment with him was given over to the caress of her voice, the luck and pull and harry of her hands.

IV

HONORA'S reception for Juliette and Rob seemed to be a thorough jinx from the beginning. John balked at the idea. Rob was crossly ungrateful; and though Juliette roused from her absorption in herself and her husband to approve the plan, she was of no use in its execution.

After an engraver had been late with invitations, Warburton's best decorator had gone on his vacation, and Cally scorched Honora's new gown in a final pressing, the crushing blow fell in the defection of the Macys. The Macys, a family of caterers who could be depended upon to satiate the inner man with the latest thing in refreshment, and the outer eye with food properly served, were synonymous with Warburton social affairs; but on this night of nights what must the Macy grandfather do but suffer a stroke of apoplexy, and draw all the relatives to his bedside in hourly expectation of his demise? So to the Fornham house there came the food that the Macys had prepared, but to serve it there were only such last-minute substitutes as they could find.

Carol Beaton arrived in the first contingent of guests to find Honora, an apron over her burned dress, trying to impress upon three incompetent girls that a table, to be properly set, should begin with the premise of a cloth laid with corners foursquare.

"You poor darling!" cried Carol. "Here, give me that apron! We passed scads of motors all headed this way, and you must be in the reception line."

"But these wretched girls—morons every one! And I let Mrs. Dinsmore go to Boston for the week-end."

"I'll whip them into shape. Run along!"

And, protesting, Honora was pushed from the room.

In the dim whir of amenities that followed, Honora had to give tribute to Juliette. The soft golden-brown of her gown found answering lights in her eyes, and one great ocher rose held in its depths the warmth of her fine coloring. A splendid-

looking woman, admitted Honora—if only you could think her the mother or aunt of that slender youth at her side!

Mercifully the orchestra had not failed, and there came a time when the rooms vibrated to the rhythm of fox-trotting figures; when men slipped off to the library for a sip of John's hidden stock and a comparison of golf scores; when girls in light wisps of chiffon drifted away with dark-clad boyish figures for a rendezvous in the garden; and when Honora Fornham could at last give thought to the evening's hoodooed refreshments.

In the dining room, and on the veranda adjoining, snowy white tables were appropriately laid. She blessed Carol as she passed the three girls, now distributing olives, and went on to the kitchen. There, laughing together over a huge wassail bowl, were Carol and Rob.

"The Macy punch is all but gone," the girl explained, "so I sent to town for loads of grape juice, and Rob came to my rescue in the general mixture."

"It's the cat's front tooth in punches—we admit that. Here, Hon, have a taste!"

Honora smacked with a dubious—

"Rob, a spike! I don't know—"

"Just a mild swat, Hon, and the Gildens are the only dries here. How about a bit more sugar, Carol?"

"Perhaps, but only a suggestion."

They mixed and tasted contentedly, leaving Honora to interview ice-packed rows of frozen salads, plates filled with the well known Macy sandwiches, and a great wooden tub containing a confection known as julep pudding.

When she turned back, it was to silence. Carol and Rob were still at the punch bowl, but the light gayety had died from their faces. They were looking at each other—looking their realization of a vast mistake and a blank, blank future.

Honora heard the girl's breath catchily indrawn, as she drew her eyes from Rob's and moved the punch ladle with meaningless little jabs.

"Ice!" she said. "We'll need more ice."

She dived for the pantry. She didn't want Rob to follow—Honora knew that; but follow he did, while his sister looked helplessly after him. Why, why, she asked herself, had he not realized this before he went to New York — before he made so ghastly a mistake?

Even as she thought it, in the door of the butler's pantry loomed a matronly figure with a golden-brown dress caught at one side by a great ocher rose—the mistake herself! There was purposeful menace in Juliette's advance upon her sister-in-law.

"I thought Rob was here," she said.

"He was—he must be about." A futile gesture intimated that he might be somewhere—anywhere. "He was helping with the punch, I think—yes, helping with the punch."

"Helping you," translated Juliette, "and Carol Beaton!"

"Carol was here. We—"

There was a movement within the pantry. Juliette started firmly in that direction, but Rob forestalled her, appearing in the doorway with a large square of ice. Behind him was Carol.

"Oh!" exclaimed Rob vaguely. "Oh, Juliette!"

He had stopped on seeing her, but now he came forward to deposit the ice in the wine-hued mixture. There must be some way to avert the storm, thought Honora, some means of placation. If only she could think! If only she could do anything but stand there as if paralyzed!

Of the three, only Carol retained her self-possession. She advanced straight to Juliette, her head high, her eyes smiling.

"I hope you will forgive us," she said. "I know it was unpardonable to borrow Rob from your reception, but it was for only a minute, and we *did* need him."

Juliette's face appeared swollen and ugly. As the veteran of a cyclone would flee to a cellar for protection, so Honora longed to fly before that dreadful wrath should descend upon Carol's gallant young head.

"You've needed Rob for a long time." Juliette's voice was taut and high. "If you can't get him any other way, I suppose you have to borrow him!"

"Juliette!" warned Rob, but she swept on fiercely.

"You had first chance at him, though. Why didn't you get him then? Did it ever occur to you that he would have taken you if he'd wanted you? Well, he didn't want you, and he doesn't now; so instead of borrowing, you'd better find a man of your own. If you—"

Rob stopped her there. The thunder of his voice broke through her wrath. He forced her from the room, casting back upon Carol a piteous supplication for her indulgence.

The girl, white and still, watched them go. When Honora put an arm about her shoulders, a shudder swept her slender body.

"How horrible!" she said. "How horrible—for him!"

And the older woman knew how greatly Carol loved Rob. In this moment she thought not of her own humiliation, but of his.

"My dear!" Honora said. "What can I say?"

"Nothing." The girl gave her a quick kiss. "My car is outside. I'll just slip away. Please don't be too sorry. It isn't your fault, or Rob's."

V

SUPPER slipped by in a haze. It was John who had dragged Juliette from her room and Rob from the garden.

"They have to come," Honora had said desperately. "With Carol gone, imagine how people will gossip! They have to come!"

And come they did.

While Honora ached with the strain of it, Cally, developing a few last-minute brains, engineered the three incompetents through the process of serving. All these strange, troublesome people would go home soon—such was Honora's only thought. They must go. What a hideous party!

Came the time at last when the orchestra, like good unionists, packed instruments into their respective cases, and when Mrs. Gilden began a general exodus by coming to Honora with the ironic assurance that her affair had been "quite perfect." As her guests took their leave, Honora nodded and smiled interminably. No, she wouldn't forget the luncheon on Thursday. Yes, she would see what she could do about a lecturer from Boston for the club's next Friday afternoon. Tea some time next week would be perfectly lovely—and all the rest of it.

When they were all gone, Juliette peremptorily ushered Rob upstairs. Honora, eager to seek her own rest, was stopped by John's voice calling to her from the drawing-room. She found him there, a solid figure in his evening clothes, amid cigarette butts, emptied glasses, some one's forgotten scarf, a withered corsage, all the inevitable débris of a four-hour party.

"Hon," he said, "a woman is coming out here."

"A woman? Who?"

He shrugged his massive shoulders.

"She phoned me from the hotel. Rickard is her name. Said she'd come here from the South, with an important disclosure affecting my family. Seems she's just arrived, and wants to leave again as soon as possible, on account of a sick relative. She'd happened to hear that we were having a party, and she thought, since we were still up, we might let her come to-night."

"But who—why—"

"Easy! We won't tell Rob."

Their brother came in, white and tired.

"Juliette has a headache," he explained. "Have you any aspirin, Hon?"

"Yes—in my medicine closet."

Leaving the room, Rob gave them a searching, suspicious glance. He must have heard the motor from the stairs, for, when John went to greet the unknown guest, Rob came striding back to his sister.

"See here, Hon!" he demanded. "Who is that?"

"Some one to see John."

"But who?"

"I don't know—a client, perhaps."

"Hon, you're not telling the truth! If it were nothing more than a client you wouldn't be here. Is it—is it Juliette?"

"I don't know—no, of course not. Hadn't you better get the aspirin?"

"No," answered Rob. "I'd better stay right here."

Voices sounded in the hall, and there was no time for argument. John entered, bringing with him a tall, blond woman who wore excessive refinement with the consciousness of a cloak. Introductions the newcomer received—or, rather, passed over—as irrelevant to the occasion; nor did she pause to take the chair that John pushed forward. Her accent was Southern, with the flavor of college training.

"You have in this house"—she came to the point direct—"a woman who calls herself Juliette McComb."

"Juliette Fornham," corrected John. "My brother's wife."

Miss Rickard did not note his gesture toward Rob, whom apparently, she did not see in the rôle of Juliette's husband.

"*Your* brother's wife," she answered, "and *my* brother's wife"—with ironic emphasis on the pronouns.

Rob, incredulous, took a forward step. John's eyes seemed to leap out from their heavy brows.

"Rickard," said the visitor abruptly. "Juliette Rickard. She has no right to any other name. She was never divorced."

"There's some mistake, of course!" John forestalled Rob, who was about to speak. "My brother's wife is from New York. Possibly they chance to have the same name."

"No—no mistake," the Southern woman retorted shortly. "I should know. I've had a detective working on this ever since I saw the marriage notice in a New York paper. She's originally from Kensington, Alabama, and she married my brother there seventeen years ago. If you cared to come down, you'd find all the records."

"Your brother!" Rob spoke dully. "Is he dead?"

"No—in a sanitarium."

"But a divorce—perhaps unknown to you—"

"There was no divorce," came the positive rejoinder.

Miss Rickard fumbled a card from her purse. After scribbling upon this with a silver pencil, she passed the bit of pasteboard to John, explaining:

"That is my address. Write, if you want further information. I'm sorry to leave now, but there is a three-o'clock train, and I have had an urgent telegram calling me home."

As abruptly as she had come, she moved, thin-lipped and avenging, out of the room. They heard her taxicab chug away down the drive and whisper into silence on the boulevard.

They stood avoiding one another's gaze, ill at ease, and wondering if they had not dreamed this amazing visitation. A voice from the stairway broke through the strain —Juliette's, high and complaining:

"Rob! Rob! Where are you?"

Her husband turned in a listening attitude, but made no answer.

"Rob!" The call approached. Juliette was in the doorway. "I heard voices." She pulled her salmon-colored negligee about her. "Who was it? What—what is the matter?"

"Rickard!" explained Rob, in a hoarse half whisper. "Her name was Rickard. She's your—your—"

Juliette shrank before them. The color drained from her face. Her eyes were dead, agonized things.

At a gesture from John, Honora followed him out of the room. As they went, Juliette's voice followed them, frightened, desperate, her last cry for Rob's love:

"I know what she must have told you! She always hated me. They all did. They're queer, and he was worse than that —insane! He had to be put in a sanitarium. I came away then. I'd suffered so much that I never wanted to see any of them again. The doctors said he wouldn't live a year. I took my maiden name. I thought of him as dead. When I met you, why shouldn't I love you? Five years had passed, and I supposed him gone long ago. I did write to ask, but we were married so hastily that I didn't know the truth until after we came up here. Oh, don't blame me! He was crazy. You can't understand —you can't dream what it means, living for years with a person like that!"

She looked half mad herself, clutching at Rob's shoulders, one strand of her hair escaped from its net and falling across her cheek.

"Then we really aren't married at all!"

As if he had scarcely heard her, he came to the conclusion with youthful brutality.

"Don't say that! Oh, don't! Isn't our love above laws? He's very ill now. He may die at any moment. If he doesn't, I can get a divorce. No one need ever know. Rob! Rob! Put your arms around me! Tell me we'll not give each other up!"

"Yes," said Rob, and pushed her firmly from him. "Yes, Juliette, that's just what we'll do. I'll make some provision for you, but we're through."

And he left her there, all her splendid color gone—left her among the débris of the room, shrunken and trembling and suddenly very old.

On another evening, some months later, an interesting subject of conversation found its way to the dinner tables of the Country Club crowd. Rob Fornham was bringing his new wife home on the eight-o'clock train. Lucky boy, the conservatives said, to have got out of that other affair so easily! Just proved that marriage should be contracted calmly and sedately.

The younger, I'd-be-wild-if-I-dared contingent rolled the romance upon appreciative tongues. Thrilling, wasn't it? After everything seemed so hopeless, to find that Juliette had another husband, so that Rob could marry Carol Beaton after all! It was nice that such things happened now and then in prosaic old Warburton.

The Hobby Hound

SHOWING THAT THERE ARE MORE REASONS THAN ONE WHY EVEN A HARD-HEADED MAN MAY BECOME A STAMP COLLECTOR

By John Holden

IT was Peter Doane's boast that, like President Coolidge, he possessed no hobby. Other men might waste their time and money collecting musty old books, or Indian arrowheads, or canceled postage stamps, if they would; but Doane preferred to keep his neat little bachelor's apartment uncluttered with such truck. Collections are all right for married men who possess permanent habitations and need a mental retreat from the boredom of domesticity, he averred; but for a foot-loose and fancy-free fellow like himself they are nothing but an incumbrance.

Stocks and bonds were the only things that he wanted to lay up and gloat over. The steel engravings on the bundle that he kept in a safe-deposit vault satisfied whatever hankering for an art collection he might ever have possessed. The removal of coupons therefrom brought him quite as much joy as the removal of dust and rust from a hoary antique brings to a lover of classical art.

It was the same with sports. At the office where he earned a good salary as an expert accountant, Doane's confrères had urged upon him the advisability of taking up golf, or tennis, or something similar, if he wished to retain his health. Pick one game, they said, and become an expert at it—that is the modern idea.

Doane couldn't see it, however. Specialization and a desire for proficiency rob sports of their recreational value, he claimed; so he played games only when he really wished to, with small concern as to whether he won or lost. It must be admitted that his trim figure and alert bearing did not indicate that he was making any serious mistake.

Circumstances have been known to alter the case of even a hobby hating bachelor. A significant circumstance in the life of Peter Doane was the government's decision, in 1925, to commemorate the beginning of the Revolutionary War by issuing a special set of Lexington-Concord postage stamps. Doane possessed a remote ancestor who had shouldered a musket in that historic rumpus; so when he noticed a set of the stamps in a stamp dealer's sidewalk show case one day, he paused and gave heed, and thereby laid himself open for a swift kick from the foot of fate.

It was an attractive set. On one of the three stamps General Washington was shown reviewing a Colonial regiment. On another the embattled farmers were pictured in their first clash with the hated redcoats. On the third was an excellent though diminutive engraving of Daniel Chester French's famous statue of a minuteman, together with a stanza from Emerson's patriotic poem. Very appropriate stamps they were, thought Doane; clearly engraved, despite their limited area, and richly colored in green, red, and blue respectively. They were indeed a set in which a Son of the Revolution could hardly fail to take an interest.

So Doane stood in front of the show case on the crowded sidewalk, for all the world like one of those goofy stamp collectors for whom he had no respect whatever, until presently he decided that it would be only a gesture of respect toward his heroic ancestor to step into the dealer's shop and purchase the set.

Not to keep, of course—no, sir! That would be collecting, and Doane wouldn't collect even things of value, let alone such insignificant trifles as postage stamps. He would purchase the stamps — which were

unused—so that he could examine them at his leisure, without getting elbowed and bumped and trod upon by hurrying pedestrians; and then he would get rid of them by the simple expedient of sticking them on mail matter. So Doane tramped up a dusty stairway to Room 10, and pushed open a battered door.

The stamp shop proved to be just what he had anticipated—a disordered little coop, furnished in the style of 1880, with bare floors, unlovely walls, and the general atmosphere of an attic.

To his amazement, however, the clerk who stepped up to the little counter wasn't like that. No, indeed! She was as pretty a girl as he had seen in many moons—a bright-eyed, slender, neatly gowned young woman who looked as much out of place in that musty den as a new dime in a mud puddle.

She smiled at Doane and asked what could she do for him.

"Those Lexington stamps in the exhibition frame downstairs—I'd like to buy them," said he.

"Surely! The premium is only five cents. I presume you've got the Pilgrim set already?"

"Why—er—no."

Doane did not know what she was talking about, but he preferred not to show his ignorance.

"Then, of course, you'll want those, too. Everybody does who buys the Lexington set."

She exhibited the Pilgrim commemorative issue, and, for the reason that his battling forefather had been of Pilgrim stock, Doane examined it with as much interest as the first set. He recollected having seen the two-cent specimen of this issue on letters, but, with the carelessness of the non-philatelist, he had paid no special attention to it.

"I'll take those, too," he said, after hesitating a little.

He realized that in buying two sets he was flirting with the dangerous collecting mania. All of them were uncanceled, however, so he presumed that he could ultimately use them for their legitimate business purpose.

"Anything else?" queried the girl. "An album to keep them in, perhaps?"

"No, thanks," said Doane, looking at her and thinking what an extremely pleasant voice she had.

"Of course not! Stupid of me to ask. Only beginners in philately buy albums, and I ought to have known you're not that."

Doane realized that he ought to set her right in the matter of his being a non-collector, but, strangely enough, he didn't want to look small in her eyes. In fact, he was tempted to ask her about other stamps, merely in order that he might listen to her musical voice; but he didn't. He realized that it is in just such a manner, by succumbing first to a small temptation and then to larger and more expensive ones, that one drifts into the dangerous whirlpool of the collecting craze.

He took his stamps and turned toward the door, with reluctance, but also with firmness.

"Come in again some time," invited the winsome clerk. "There are some early American stamps that I'd very much like to show you — pictures of pony express riders, and so on."

"Thank you," said Doane. "Perhaps I will."

Out on the sidewalk again, he rebuked himself for having said that. Certainly he didn't intend to return. He wasn't a stamp collector, and wouldn't become one for anything.

Nevertheless, Doane kept thinking about the stamp girl that afternoon. She sure was a good-looker! Pleasant, too, and mysterious—yes, just that. There she was, a bright, snappy, thoroughly modern young woman, set in that musty old den like a diamond in a cobweb. Why?

Doane began almost to regret that he wasn't a stamp collector. If he were, he could drop in on her again, in response to her cordial invitation, and might get really acquainted with her. He would like to. He didn't meet that sort of girl every day, or even every year—one that was as chic and snappy as any fluff-headed flapper, and yet intelligent enough to discuss the Revolution, and the Pilgrims, and similar substantial topics.

Those other stamps that she spoke of—the ones that showed a picture of the old-time pony express—come to think of it, he would like to see those. Stamps that pictured such episodes in American history must be interesting. He hadn't known that there were any. He wondered if he couldn't run into the little shop next day, just for a look at the pony stamp. Not that he would

consider buying it—no, sir! No girl on earth could make a stamp collector out of him.

II

NEXT day Doane found himself in the little shop again, nervous and embarrassed because he felt like an impostor, but delighted at the opportunity to talk to the attractive clerk again. She held the pony express stamp up so that he could see it in a good light, and her bobbed hair, coming in contact with Doane's nose, dizzied him slightly with its subtle perfume and with a suggestion of intimacy.

"Here's another specimen of the quaint 1869 set," she said, picking up a blue one that showed an old-fashioned locomotive. "Aren't they interesting?"

"I should say so!" agreed Doane.

Then he wished he hadn't been so enthusiastic, because she might expect him to buy them.

"Cheap, too, considering their scarcity. I can let you have the two for—"

She broke off, because just then the door swung open and a man entered.

He was a queer sort of man—old and grim and musty, like everything in the shop except the amazingly out-of-place girl. He was tall and bent, and his clothes hung on him like bags. He had a nose like a beak, a mouth like a slot in a child's bank, and hands that resembled the dried roots of a long-pulled stump. Evidently he was the proprietor of the business, for he shuffled around behind the counter and rudely elbowed the girl aside.

"Cheap!" he croaked, looking at the stamps on the counter, and scrutinizing Doane with fishy little eyes. "The best value on the street I can give—if you mean business!"

Doane did not miss the insinuation that he was a mere shopper. He glanced at the girl, and noticed that she was embarrassed and apparently frightened. He decided quickly that he might get her into trouble by walking out without buying anything, so he said:

"How much?"

"For the two," croaked the dealer, "only ninety cents."

Doane started. Practically a dollar for two stamps—useless ones, at that, because they were canceled! To buy them seemed like pitching money into the East River; but that lovely girl must be protected.

"I'll take them," he said.

The dealer gave him change out of a chamois money pouch that was as deep as a woman's stocking, and did not utter one word of thanks. Doane glanced at the girl as he went out.

"I may come in again for some others," he could not help saying.

"Do," she said, and the invitation put spring into his steps like new rubber heels.

That afternoon Doane thought of the stamps in his pocket with a feeling of uneasiness. Was he becoming a collector, after all—a type of person that he had always despised? And of such useless things as canceled postage stamps, too?

He looked at the tiny bits of paper that had cost him almost a dollar, and frowned. Then he replaced them in his pocket, and smiled. In a case like this, he concluded, it was all right to buy stamps—yes, stamps or anything else. They were mere counters in a game, and the game, by George, was distinctly worth while. He was getting acquainted with that wonderful girl in the queer old shop.

Next day Doane was in the place again, eager to talk, and delighted to find the girl alone once more. Given the slightest encouragement, he meant to steer their conversation toward personal matters.

"I think it's so nice to be interested in stamps," she stated. "It's a neat, clean hobby—better than others, I think, because stamps aren't cumbersome."

"That's true," agreed Doane, surprised to realize that one of his reasons for being a non-collector—the fact that collections are cumbersome—did not apply to the stamp hobby.

"I presume you have quite an extensive collection?"

Doane was reluctant to lie, but unwilling to be considered a novice.

"Why—er—no, not exactly," he said. "If I can advise you about any you've got—their present value, or anything like that—I'll be glad to."

A thought struck Doane with the force of a falling brick. Here was his chance really to get acquainted!

"It happens that I—er—would like to have your opinion on some stamps," he said nervously; "but I'm afraid you couldn't give it to me here. It would take you some little time to go over them, and the chances are we'd be interrupted. If I might—er—see you somewhere else—" He paused,

panic-stricken, as he saw the girl start and stare at him. "Aside from the stamps, I'd really like to know you better," he finished with desperate courage.

"Well!" exclaimed the clerk.

"Sounds very bold, I suppose," quavered Doane; "but, you see, there's no one to introduce me properly. I'll tell you who I am, if you like."

He gave a brief biography of himself, in the stumbling manner of a schoolboy making excuses to his teacher.

"Very interesting!" remarked the girl.

"Please," begged Doane, "let me call on you with—er—my stamps!"

Suddenly she smiled.

"All right—this evening, if you wish. It's horribly unconventional, I know, but, as you say, there's no one to introduce us; and I'm sure that a real collector can't be a villain." She scribbled an address. "That's where I live. Mary Westover is the name."

"I can't tell you, Miss Westover, how happy you've made me!"

"Don't forget to bring your stamps," she warned.

"I—I won't," Doane promised with a guilty feeling. "I guess I'd better go now, before your employer comes."

"Do, please." She lowered her voice mysteriously. "And don't let him know that you're calling on me."

"No chance!"

Doane started for the door, but not soon enough to avoid another meeting with the evil-visaged old man, whose name Mary Westover had failed to mention. The dealer was clumping up the stairs, breathing heavily and clutching at the railing. When he reached the landing, he peered suspiciously at Doane, and his simian lips curled to something like a sneer.

"Buying more stamps to-day?" he croaked.

"No—just looking."

"Humph!"

The old man pushed past and disappeared into his shop. Doane, still standing on the landing, could hear through the closed door his querulous voice admonishing Mary about something. Poor girl! Why did she work for such a cranky employer? It must be because she was a collector and loved the atmosphere, Doane concluded.

Doane went down the creaky old stairs and walked toward his office. Presently his fear for Mary's welfare became less acute. Doubtless her employer was harmless enough. Peculiar old fellows, he recollected, are no rarity in any business that caters to the collecting hobby.

Then Doane stopped suddenly. That stamp collection that he had undertaken to show Mary that evening! He possessed no such thing, and what was he going to do about it?

He considered for a moment. Then he grinned, for surely it would not be a hard matter to get hold of a collection. He must do it at once, however, before returning to the office for his afternoon's work, because after five o'clock the stamp shops might be closed.

He walked along until he noticed another stamp dealer's sign, entered, and said he would like to have a nice assortment of inexpensive American stamps. Mary had shown a special interest in the American issues, so naturally they were the ones he should get.

Doane smiled as a young man turned to procure an assortment. Despite all his railing against the collecting hobby, here he was buying stamps like a schoolboy! Well, he didn't care now. He would collect the labels off tin cans if thereby he could win the interest of charming Mary Westover.

The clerk showed him some inexpensive stamps, and, as he looked at them, Doane was struck by a new and somewhat alarming thought. Mary wouldn't be interested in cheap specimens. His "collection" should contain at least a few rarities. He indicated an old stamp that caught his attention because he hadn't noticed one like it in Mary's stock and asked its price.

"Forty dollars," replied the clerk, without batting an eye.

"What?" cried Doane. "That much money for a canceled one-cent postage stamp?"

"Surely. That's not high. We have specimens that run to four hundred and more."

"But who—who buys them?"

"Collectors who have money."

"They must be crazy!" said Doane with emphasis. "No stamp can possibly be worth that much money!"

"Anything is worth what it brings in the open market, and there are stamps in existence that have brought three or four thousand. Would you like to see some really rare ones?"

"Good Lord, no!"

Doane wondered just what he was getting into. He had considered the collecting of stamps to be an inexpensive juvenile hobby, but such, it seemed, was not the case. Anxiety smote him, too. Should he carry cheap stamps to Mary, and thereby reveal himself as a poor dub of a piker collector, or should he fling his money away like a drunken sailor for the privilege of impressing her?

His decision was quickly arrived at. Fling it, by George!

" Give me that forty-dollar one," he said; " and two other rare ones. Put them into a little album, with about three or four dozen ordinary stamps, and I'll take them with me."

Perspiration beaded Doane's brow as he exchanged crisp new yellowbacks for dingy little canceled postage stamps, but he comforted himself with the thought that the end justified the means. Mary's regard would be cheap at any price. He congratulated himself, when he got out of the place, for not having succumbed to the temptation to be a piker, and that evening he betook himself to Miss Westover's address with confidence and large hopes.

III

At a modest walk-up apartment house, Doane pushed the Westover bell and climbed three flights of stairs to where Mary stood in a doorway waiting for him. She took him into a living room that bespoke taste but not wealth, and introduced him to a sweet-faced mother and a smart young brother.

" I hope you didn't get into any trouble with your employer this afternoon," Doane remarked.

He noticed that an expression of concern leaped to Mary's face; but it was immediately replaced with a smile.

" Oh, no," she replied; " I'm used to Mr. Bassett's odd ways."

" Mr. Bassett, eh? Then I suppose he's no relation?"

" No."

" Well, he can't interrupt us now."

" I hope not."

Doane was surprised at her reply, but decided not to mar this wonderful evening with further mention of the old dealer, and brought out his stamp album.

" Here are the ones I was telling you about. Two or three are rather valuable, I think."

Mary gasped when she saw them.

" Oh, my, yes! Such beauties! To think that you should have them, after I had almost concluded that you were only a novice at the collecting game!"

" Ahem!" said Doane, modestly, and also noncommittally.

" But I have some here that are almost as good." She took an album from a drawer and opened it at a page that had about a dozen stamps stuck to it on hinges. " See? Notice how the two valuable ones stand out from the others?"

" Y-yes," said Doane weakly, because to him they all looked alike.

" Here's another beauty on this page," Mary said, flipping over a leaf. " Let's see how quickly you can pick it out from the common ones!"

Doane gulped. He wasn't prepared for an ordeal of this kind. Idiot that he was, why hadn't he admitted at the start that he knew practically nothing about stamps? He fudged around a bit, trying to kill time with conversation — and then, to his immense relief, the bell from the outside door rang.

Mary wasn't relieved, however.

" If that's Mr. Bassett—" she began in a frightened tone, and then broke off to smile mechanically. " But of course it isn't!"

She gave her attention to the album, and Doane wondered again what mysterious hold it was that the evil-looking dealer had upon this lovely girl.

The caller wasn't Bassett—only a neighbor's girl come to borrow a cup of sugar. The arrival proved to be a blessing, because, without further insistence that Doane should pick the good stamp from the inferior ones, Mary indicated it herself and asked him to regard it with the reverence that it deserved.

He looked at it with more relief than reverence, for it proved to be the dingiest and dirtiest-looking of all the specimens on the page—the very last one that he would have picked.

" Now here on the next page are some more," she resumed, and Doane prepared for another ordeal. " See this one? Notice the triangles in the corners that make this specimen so rare, because the triangles were left off most of the stamps of that issue? But it's silly of me to be pointing that out to you, when you could see it for yourself at a glance!"

"Not silly at all," Doane protested. "Perhaps I'm not the expert that you think I am. Frankly, I'm not so familiar with some of the issues as I ought to be."

"Glad to hear it, because, to tell you the truth, I'm not, either. Of course, you know all about the famous rare stamp of the 1851 issue. Even the novice collectors know that, and it's actually here. Yes—on the next page." She turned the leaf slowly. "Prepare for a treat!"

Prepare for utter humiliation, thought Doane, wondering with abysmal wretchedness why he had permitted this wonderful girl to think him a real collector when he wasn't even a good novice. Could he ever explain? Would she ever pardon him?

"Look!" cried Mary.

Five seconds of tense silence, while Doane scrutinized stamps that looked all alike; then—

"Listen!" cried he. "That footstep!"

Mary listened, and gasped.

"Bassett! He's coming, after all!"

Shivery silence, while the recognizable clump, clump of the old dealer's feet approached the door. Then a thunderous knocking upon it.

"I'll go," suggested Doane.

"No!" said Mary, and went herself.

She opened the door, and, sure enough, the gaunt old dealer entered the room—stormed into it, rather, because plainly Bassett was in a passion. His clawlike fingers opened and shut as he advanced upon Mary, who kept backing toward Doane.

"You thief!" rasped Bassett. "Where are my stamps that you stole?"

"I didn't steal anything!" Mary cried.

"What do you call it, then?"

"I borrowed them to show them to a collector. They're right here."

"Return them!"

Mary handed Bassett the album she had been showing to Doane. The old dealer looked through the pages, to make sure that nothing was missing. Then he glared from Mary to Doane.

"Why do you call Miss Westover a thief?" inquired Doane.

Not for an instant did he believe the charge to be justified.

"She walked off with them without saying a word," explained Bassett, somewhat mollified by the discovery that his precious bits of paper had not been tampered with. "I went back to the office this evening, and found them gone."

"You weren't there when I left, so I couldn't ask permission to take them," said Mary. "I didn't dream that you'd object. You let buyers take stamps out on approval all the time. You even send the cheaper ones to unknown persons who write in for approval sheets. That's part of the stamp business. No other dealer would mind if his clerk carried a few specimens home to show to a friend."

"Clerk! You're no clerk of mine!" growled Bassett. "You're discharged! I don't want you any more. You look too flip for a stamp dealer's office, anyhow."

"Well, I'm glad you don't want me!" retorted Mary. "I only took the job because I couldn't get anything else; but I worked early and late to learn the trade."

Doane looked significantly toward the door.

"I fancy that your business is concluded, Mr. Bassett," he suggested.

The dealer eyed him with a sneer.

"You keep out of my place, too. You're no collector—I could tell it the minute I looked at you."

He turned and went out, slamming the door.

For a moment there was silence.

"What must you think of me?" quavered Mary. "I'm not an expect, Mr. Doane. I just talked like one because you're a collector, even though Bassett says you're not. I took a chance on vexing my boss because I wanted to have something interesting to show you; but I didn't dream he'd think me a thief—at least, not while I was in the office, though I began to worry a bit when I got home. No ordinary man would think that."

"You're not," Doane assured her. "As for your not being an expert, I'm delighted, because I'm not one, either. Those stamps I showed you were bought this very afternoon, for your sake, simply because I wanted to please you, just as you wanted to please me."

"Those good ones?" cried Mary. "You paid forty or fifty dollars apiece for those, just to show them to me?"

"Yes."

"But why?"

She seemed to guess the reason, however, for she blushed like a schoolgirl.

"Because—because I love you, Mary!"

Two hours later it was mutually agreed that the loss of Mary's position was a matter of no importance.

The Gift Horse

THE STORY OF OLD PETER HAMLIN, OF WIRRALOO RANCH, QUEENSLAND AND HIS TWO ENGLISH NEPHEWS

By Alan Sullivan

THE Hamlin estate was one of those comparatively small affairs whose records accumulate in a tin box with a name outside—a box opened at intervals by the solicitor in whose office it rests year after year. Such business involves little work and a modest but secure profit. The Hamlin box had been in the office of Trask & Frimley for a matter of forty years, during which both Trask and Frimley had passed on to a rest of which they had no urgent need, and the firm's business came into the hands of young John Fort.

Peter Hamlin, whose age Fort reckoned must be about seventy, remained in Australia during these forty years. He wrote home to Cobham every six months—short, dry letters, generally inclosing a bond or a stock certificate to be put in the tin box. Trask & Frimley collected his dividends, reinvested them, and several times in every year submitted offers to purchase the old Hamlin house. This was a small Georgian place on the outskirts of the town. The offers were invariably declined, as was quite expected, but they made opportunity for a six-and-eightpenny item in the annual account for services rendered.

Every one had forgotten old Peter except his two nephews, and their memories were merely the lively anticipation of possible benefits later on. They never heard from him—not once. Then, very unexpectedly, a letter was handed in to Trask & Frimley, and Fort, reading it, decided that the old man was becoming a shade more human. The letter arrived in March.

DEAR SIRS:

About my house and my nephews. I'd like to do something for these two young men in a small way; so will you please have the house put in good order, and offer it to Mr. George Hamlin rent free for July, and to Mr. Michael for August, gardener included. As to the gardener, I want you to employ William Mockridge, by whom this letter will be given you. The garden may need a good deal of work, so you can take him on at once, at say three pounds a week, or less if you can arrange it. He has had a hard time out here, wants to get back to England, and seems to know enough about flowers for the purpose.

In case either of my nephews declines this offer, the other one might have the house for both months. I may want it later myself, as I am thinking of coming over. Meantime please address me as usual. You will recognize my signature, but, anyway, a copy of this goes by post. I wanted Mockridge to get to work at once.

Yours faithfully,

PETER HAMLIN.

Fort, reading this, was not much impressed. The thing sounded quixotic and rather small for an elderly unmarried man who had a good many thousands laid by. Then he had Mockridge brought in — a small, weather-beaten man, with cautious and rather anxious eyes, a large mouth, seamed skin, sloping shoulders, and all the sign marks of life in the open.

"You know what's in this letter?" inquired Fort.

"I know the part about me, sir."

The man's voice was harsh, as if the stringy throat of him had cracked.

"Did Mr. Hamlin make any definite promise about your wages?"

"No, sir, but three pounds a week was thought of."

"That's more than is paid here—with a cottage. You can have fifty shillings."

Mockridge twisted his gnarled fingers.

"It isn't much, sir; but if it's all you'll give, I'll have to take it."

"Very well! Mr. Hamlin wants you to begin at once. A tenant will probably arrive in June. Let me know to-morrow what you'll need in the way of tools. You'll have to work, mind you. The place has run to seed."

"I'll do my best, sir; and perhaps"—he hesitated—"you'll put in a good word for me with Mr. Hamlin?"

"I will, if you justify it. Do you know the Wirraloo Ranch?"

"His place in Queensland? Yes—I've worked there."

"Mr. Hamlin says he may be in England later this year."

"Yes, sir—he told me that, too."

Young Fort would have liked to ask a good many questions about the exile, but it was too early in the game.

"Well," he said, "I'll come round in a few days and see how you're getting on."

The door closed, and, taking down the tin box, he studied its contents for awhile. The Hamlin estate would realize something more than forty thousand pounds, at a minimum.

A day or two later the confirmation of the old man's instructions arrived by post, and Fort dictated two letters, identical and very much to the point. Twenty-four hours after that, George Hamlin strolled into his wife's room and tossed the one he had received on her dressing table.

"Read that, old thing!"

Betty Hamlin put down her tongs and read, wrinkling a white brow and pouting not a little.

"Heavens, what are you going to do?"

"Search me! I suppose we'll accept, if we're wise."

"In June—the middle of the season?"

"I know when the season is."

"But, George, we can't! It's probably a poisonous place, and not fit to ask any one to come to. We can't entertain there. Couldn't we send the children down, and work in a week-end ourselves, just for the look of the thing?"

He lit a cigarette and puffed gloomily.

"I don't want it any more than you do, but we've got to think of the future. It's more hopeful than the past, and the old boy can't last much longer. If we mess this up, it might be expensive."

She pondered for a moment.

"Couldn't you offer it to Michael? It's more in his line. Tell the lawyer man we're awfully sorry, but we're all booked up—because we are."

George wasn't quite comfortable about that. They saw each other very rarely, these brothers. George and his wife rode buoyantly on top of the wave while the money or credit lasted. Michael and Mary, his wife, lived in Ealing, where there was no wave.

George was nothing in particular, while Michael was an analytical chemist, and worked very hard. George's wife had three thousand a year—between them they spent five—while Michael earned eight hundred and spent twenty pounds less. George was rather sparkling, and did not look his forty years by at least ten. Michael was graying at the temples, had tired eyes, from too much microscopic work, stooped his shoulders, and looked much older than he was. George had two children, while Michael had four; and the rest of the comparison you may complete for yourself.

"I believe this is a sort of try-out," George announced reflectively.

"Who's the judge? Uncle Peter's in Australia."

"It's a wild guess, but I feel that way. What about the gardener?"

"Ridiculous! If your uncle's as close as he seems to have been since you were born, he wouldn't leave anything to a gardener to decide."

"Then why does he supply one?"

"He couldn't let the place at all without one." Betty puckered a pair of very red lips, and gave herself up to thought. "I've got it! The lawyer says that if you don't accept he's to offer the hole to Michael. Well, you write to him and say that while we'd love to come, we really feel that Michael should have it, because he needs it more. You needn't mention our engagements. If it's put in the right way, it ought to make an awfully good impression. You'll score like anything, and Mike will think no end of you, too. I heard from Sally Pender this morning. She wants us for the second week-end in July, and it fits just right. Now, George, toddle—I've a lot to do to my face yet!"

George toddled. After destroying much expensive notepaper, he produced a very creditable epistle, saturated with generosity and brotherly affection. He read it to Betty, who highly approved. Then he dropped it into a pillar box and telephoned for the car.

II

MICHAEL HAMLIN got his letter from Fort on the same morning. He read it aloud at breakfast, to the accompaniment of squeaks of delight from the junior members of the family.

Neither he nor Mary had thought much about the old man, though they sometimes wondered if he must not be very lonely. As to being in any way remembered, it was not to be expected now; so when Michael looked up at his wife his eyes were much brighter than usual. Their summer holiday was generally a fortnight of being packed very tight into three small rooms; and even that was welcome.

"Can we manage it, dear?"

"Of course we can, and must!" Mary fluttered like a motherly sparrow—which, in fact, she rather resembled. "Cobham is only about forty minutes from Waterloo, so you can reach us every night before seven; and the children will—oh, my dear, of course we must manage it! But I wish—"

She broke off, her eyes suddenly moist.

"What do you wish?"

"That it was for more than one month."

"It's a lot better than nothing."

"I know, but—"

She gulped a little, and fell silent, because at the moment her heart was very full. Michael looked too old, too driven, too fine-drawn. Four children and herself on eight hundred a year, and nothing much ahead! He never thought of himself. The rest of them would pull through all right, but she wanted the country for him, with its blessed spaciousness and healing calm.

Then, two days later, came Fort's second letter, inclosing a copy of the one he had received from George. It seemed that the cup of life was full. Two whole wonderful months—sixty-one precious evenings away from the grime and jar of London! So Michael's response was very grateful, and he sent such an acknowledgment to his brother as made George turn rather pink, and reply quite testily, when Betty patted him on the back and vowed that he was a tactical genius.

"And," she added, "if that queer old bird of an uncle of yours has any reasoning powers at all, we ought to score like anything. You'll hear about it yet!"

To those who know it, Cobham must seem a gracious spot, with the pine woods out Oxshott way, and lush meadows, and great oaks and elms shading the roads, and pastures where pheasants, all bronze and gold, come out to sun themselves, and mansions whose windows overlook long, smooth vistas of park, and rose-bowered cottages that almost invite a caress. The languid river glides through field and covert till it reaches the corn mill, where there is a dripping, clacking waterwheel, and, inside, the rumble of great stones. Beside the river, on one of its loveliest bends, stood the old Hamlin house.

The place was really very complete. It had been let from time to time, and had linen—firmly woven stuff made when sheets were really sheets — and glass and silver with the Hamlin crest on it, so that Mary needed to bring but little with her.

Mockridge met them at the station, and was regarded by Philip, the older boy, with intense interest, because he must know all about gold and kangaroos. When they reached the house there were squeals of delight; and then began what is to childhood the most absorbing pursuit of all—the exploration of totally new territory.

One passes over the first week or two, except to say that both Michael and Mary began to feel younger. It may have been the vegetables that Mockridge produced in ever increasing quantities, or the still, sweet nights, or the music of the birds, or the untainted air, or the entire unexpectedness of the thing. Anyhow, it worked, so that Michael lost some of his stoop, and laughed far more than he used to. He loved the mile walk to the station in the cool of the morning; and in the evening there were always some of them who met him for the walk back.

Mary and her husband were sitting on the lawn one Sunday afternoon when the great idea swam into her mind—so great that she put it forward breathlessly.

"Mike, couldn't we buy this place?"

"Lord, how I wish we could! Just think of it!"

"But why not?"

"My dear, you're dreaming!"

"Can't we do it by paying so much down, and the rest monthly in rent and purchase?"

"We'd go on paying forever and ever, amen; and where's the first amount?"

"There's my thousand pounds. I'd love to put it into this!"

He pressed her hand.

"We swore we wouldn't touch our emergency fund."

"I feel that if we lived here there wouldn't be any emergency."

"Perhaps not," he admitted. "I'm beginning to feel that way myself; but sup-

pose Uncle Peter won't sell? He could have sold long ago, if he wished to."

"Why not try? What do you think it's worth?"

"It would be cheap at thirty-five hundred, I should say."

"That would be twenty-five hundred left, on which we'd have to pay how much?"

"Say five per cent."

"But we're paying nearly that now, and just for rent."

"I know. There's another difficulty. We're only occupying till the end of August, and we couldn't hear till the end of September."

Ealing stretched drably before her eyes, and it frightened her to realize how much she had begun to dread it.

"We could cable, couldn't we?"

"Yes."

There was a lingering note in her husband's voice that touched Mary Hamlin deeply. She silently resolved to see young Mr. Fort next day.

Then her gaze wandered to the corner of the garden in which stood the gardener's cottage. Mockridge was smoking on the doorstep, with four enraptured youngsters at his feet. She remembered that it was to be kangaroos this afternoon.

Mike and she were curious about Mockridge. From what they gathered, he had been with Peter Hamlin for a long time; but he spoke of his employer with no particular interest.

"He's a queer man, ma'am — I don't mind saying that. He's stayed up country till he's sort of got used to doing without people. Seems he wasn't much wanted at home when he was young. There's a good many in Australia like that. No, ma'am, he never said anything about his relations to me. Wirraloo Ranch—yes, it's a tin-roofed house surrounded by sheep, and as lonely as you like. Yes, I'm very comfortable here. I've always mended my own socks, thank you, and I like having the children around me, whether I'm working or not. More color now, haven't they, ma'am?"

It was then, with the great idea looming large, that she realized that without Mockridge the place couldn't be the same. Would he be content to stay?

"I haven't any agreement with Mr. Hamlin, ma'am. He gave me the job for the summer—that's all; but if it so happened you stayed on, I don't know that I'd want to move."

The idea seemed to please him—which, at the moment, meant a great deal to Mary. She felt encouraged, and ventured further, wondering how much he knew about old Peter Hamlin.

"You see, Mockridge, we'd like to buy it, if we could; but if we did, we'd have to run it very economically, and I don't see how we could give fifty shillings and the cottage. Do you think we could arrange something like your taking over the vegetable garden, just as if it were yours? I mean that you might have the cottage, and we'd buy our vegetables from you; and in that case we wouldn't pay any wages, but you'd look after the place for the use of the cottage and the land."

She said this rather nervously, but very much in earnest.

"Just as if I owned it myself?" he asked.

"Yes. Would there have to be some sort of agreement?"

"Not in Australia; but here—yes, I reckon there would have to be. I'll think it over, ma'am. Meantime I hope I'm giving satisfaction?"

She put her hand impulsively on his arm.

"I can't imagine what we'd do without you, any of us! And, Mockridge, if you don't stay, I'm not sure that we want to buy."

He touched his cap.

"I'd be glad to have Mr. Hamlin know that, if he comes here."

III

Mary Hamlin went to see young Mr. Fort the next day. It struck her that he was secretly amused when she stated her case; but he was very understanding, and, she thought, sympathetic, though he doubted the wisdom of cabling. Mr. Hamlin would hardly cable a reply. Added to this was the fact that a few months previously he had declined a proposal to sell for a larger sum, all cash.

"I suppose," she asked rather dejectedly, "you couldn't bring any pressure on him? After all, my husband is a blood relation."

Young Fort stroked his smooth chin.

"I don't think he's the sort of man that yields to pressure."

She sighed.

"I'm afraid not. If he could only see the children, it might make a difference."

" Perhaps the wisest thing is to let the matter stand for a few weeks, until I know whether he will be in England this summer or not. It's quite possible that he may take the house himself in September."

" With Mockridge?"

" I don't believe he would part with Mockridge."

Mary realized that it had been a pointless question. She pictured this lonely, hard-fisted, cantankerous old man enjoying the house and garden while the rest of them were engulfed in Ealing. Queer how just a taste of paradise made one greedy for more! But it wasn't for herself.

" Then I'd better wait?"

" I would, if I were you."

She smiled her thanks, and all that Michael heard that night was that Mr. Fort rather expected Peter Hamlin in England before very long.

It was in the second week in August that a rakish and expensive car slid along a leafy road in the vicinity of Cobham, and George Hamlin, who was driving, had an inspiration.

" I say, old thing, wouldn't it be a decent act to look up Michael? He must be somewhere close by."

" Why?" said Betty. " We're late for tea as it is."

He put on the brakes.

" Dunno, but I've a sort of curiosity to see the place. Only take a minute." He beckoned to an elderly man who came up the road as he spoke. " Can you tell me where the Hamlin place is?"

The elderly man looked at the inquirer with a slow interest.

" I'm going in that direction myself. It's about a mile from here."

" Jump up, will you? I'll take you along."

The stranger got into the back seat, to Betty's obvious discomfort, which she made no attempt to conceal. The car moved forward, and George nodded sagely.

" We don't lose anything by a visit which you can cut as short as you like, and it backs up our generosity in giving way to Mike. Also, it keeps us in a kind of touch with the old bird himself — brothers reunited under his hospitable roof, eh?"

Betty was not much impressed, being rather worried that day. A payment on the car was overdue, and tradesmen in general had lost their manners — to her, at least. Life, in short, on three thousand a year had become a very embarrassing problem.

" Do you think we were wise in refusing his offer, after all?" she asked reflectively.

" Dunno; but if the old boy sees my letter and swallows it, I don't believe we shall lose anything."

" How much do you think your uncle will carve up?"

" No telling, but there'll be more fat than lean. That's generally the way with misers."

" Mr. Hamlin's place is the first on the right, sir," said a dry voice from the back seat.

" Thanks! Look here, we're only going to stay a few minutes. Will you keep an eye on this bus, and I'll leave it outside?"

As a visit, it was hardly a success, and perhaps not quite fair. Mary looked flustered and surprised, and her four children were earthy from grubbing in the garden. George and Betty, in contrast, were very well dressed and Londonish. The neat things George meant to say all evaporated, while Betty sent sidelong looks at the house, and tried to imagine herself being in it.

They got away as soon as they could, and found the car with a flat tire.

" Damn!" said George. " How did that happen?"

He became busy with a jack. The elderly man helped, by request, while Betty smoked.

" We're well out of that," she said thankfully. " What on earth made your uncle think we'd go there?"

George was dirty by now, and rather cross.

" Don't ask me! Sort of long-distance throb of humanity, I suppose. Hanged if I wouldn't like to sell this bus!"

" You can't. It isn't yours yet."

" It will be, if I can raise another three hundred."

" Hope springs eternal. Did you ever see such a mess as those children?"

" I rather liked 'em."

" I didn't. I wonder if your uncle is really coming over!"

" The possibility leaves me unmoved. We'll have to ask him to stay with us, if he does."

" Think he eats with his knife?"

" Probably. I say, you, twist the other way with that wrench, will you?"

"Sorry, sir." The elderly man was rather red in the face. "I don't know much about cars."

They got off a few minutes later, George tossing a half crown, which the man missed. They left him looking for it in the ditch.

IV

MARY heard from young Fort in two weeks, with news of Peter Hamlin.

By this time the shadow of the return to London was weighing rather heavily. She had had much to be thankful for in the past two months, and they all hated to go back to town.

The exile, it appeared, had arrived in England, and hoped it would be convenient if he came to Cobham on the afternoon of the following Saturday. If they could give him a room for the next few days, he would be much obliged. Fort added that he would take the opportunity of putting the offer for the house before his client at once, and would endeavor to get a decision.

Mary met her husband at the station that evening, and he read the letter on the way back.

"Do you think there's any chance?" she said anxiously.

Michael was not sanguine.

"If I'd seen the man, I might know; but it's not overly promising."

She slipped her arm into his, and tried not to appear downcast.

Passing the cottage they saw Mockridge, and told him the news. He took it very quietly, and ventured to remind Mary Hamlin that she had promised to put in a word for him. She said that the appearance of the place ought to speak for itself —which seemed to please him.

Also she wondered if he had grown as fond of them as they had of him; but she did not put that into words, because she was attempting—though not very successfully—to keep their coming departure out of her head.

Then came a second letter from Fort, to the effect that he had communicated with his client, who might consider the offer, in order to keep the property in the family. He would decide later.

Something whispered to Mary that it was wiser to wait for more definite news before she told Michael.

Saturday morning—Michael in London —Michael's wife very busy in preparations. They were giving Peter Hamlin their own room, the one overlooking the lawn. When it came to arranging the furniture, she called in Mockridge.

"I suppose," she said, "that this is as comfortable as Wirraloo Ranch ever was?"

He nodded.

"They're not in the same street, ma'am, for comfort."

"Is there anything special you can think of that Mr. Hamlin likes to eat?"

"There again, ma'am, you can't make any mistake. After a man has lived on fresh mutton and flapjack half his life, he'll lap up anything."

"You know," she ruminated, "I'm awfully afraid he'll change his mind about selling, and want to stay here always!"

Mockridge was inclined to agree that the exile might want to stay.

"If he does," she said with an anxious little laugh, "you'll put in a word for me, won't you?"

"I will, ma'am, if I have any kind of a chance; but Mr. Hamlin don't take kindly to influence."

"H-m! I think it would be nice if you brought in some flowers. Are there many beautiful flowers in Australia?"

"Practically none, ma'am, in the sheep country."

Then Saturday afternoon, with the Michael Hamlins on the lawn, their ears cocked for the sound of a taxi. Mockridge was out of sight for the time being. The juniors were very sleek and impatient, while Mary sent questioning glances at her husband, which he tried to answer with an encouraging but not overconfident smile. Bees were droning, and there was a whisper of wind in the trees.

"Philip," said Mary, "please tell Mockridge that he may be wanted any minute to help with Uncle Peter's luggage."

"He's not in the cottage, mother. I was there a few minutes ago."

"Then find him, dear."

Philip went off. Two—three—five minutes passed, and the boy came racing across the lawn, his eyes bulging.

"Mother, I couldn't see him anywhere, and then I found him in your old room, changing his shirt. When I asked him what he meant by it, he laughed like anything, and asked me if he would do for Uncle Peter. Did you ever hear such cheek?"

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How many breaths a minute do you take? Stop now with your watch in hand and for 60 seconds count them. Fifteen to twenty short, top-of-your-lungs breaths? You are not breathing deeply. Occasionally you should take six or eight long, leisurely breaths a minute—so deep that the diaphragm is expanded and the ribs are barreled out. Several times a day stop what you are doing, stand straight with head up, shoulders back and *breathe*—always through the nose.

Try it this way—inhale, one, two, three, four; hold, five; exhale, six, seven, eight, nine; relax, ten. This will give you six breaths a minute—quiet, unhurried breathing. After a time your unconscious breathing may become deeper and you will begin to feel a new and delightful sense of buoyant power.

Deep breathing exercises should be taken night and morning. Empty the lungs with each breath. This is important because fresh air removes harmful waste matter in the blood.

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Have you ever felt a stitch in the side when running? This is a warning—not always that your heart is weak, or that you have indigestion, but sometimes that your lungs are unaccustomed to being filled to their full capacity. One-third of the lung cells of the average person is unused. These cells tend to collapse and stick together. When the air is forced into them, it sometimes causes pain.

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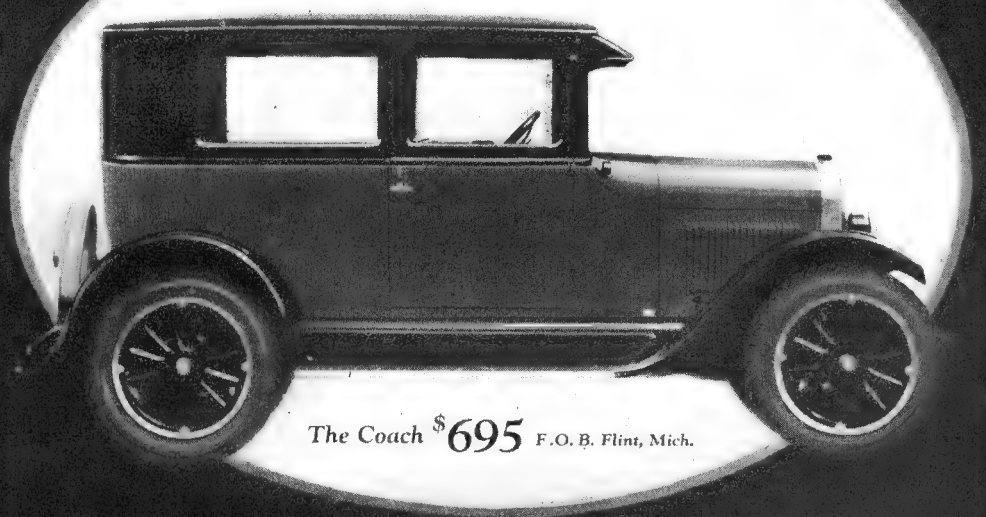

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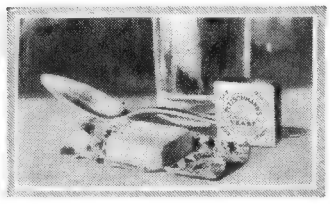

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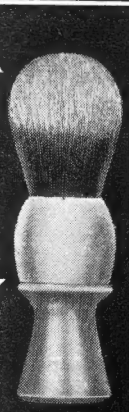

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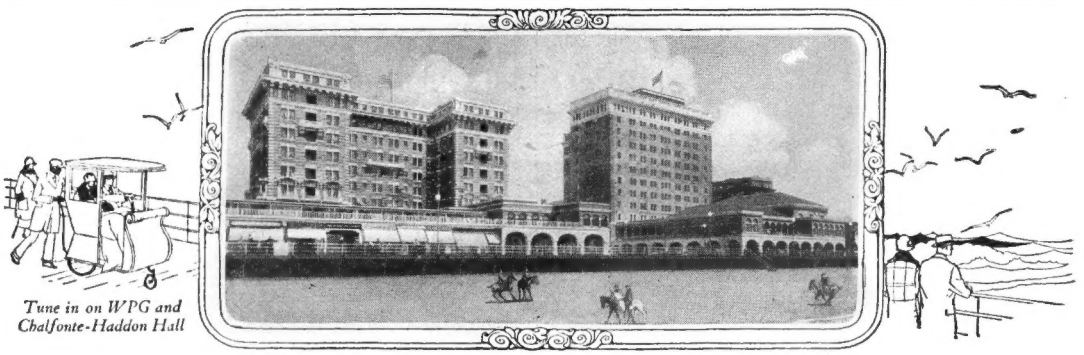

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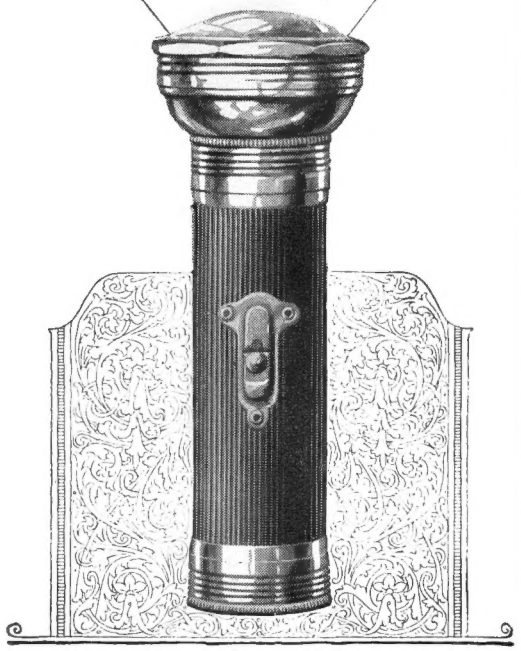

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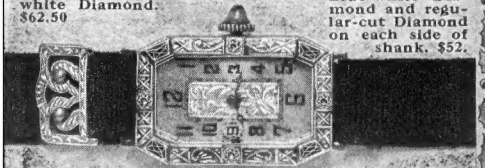

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